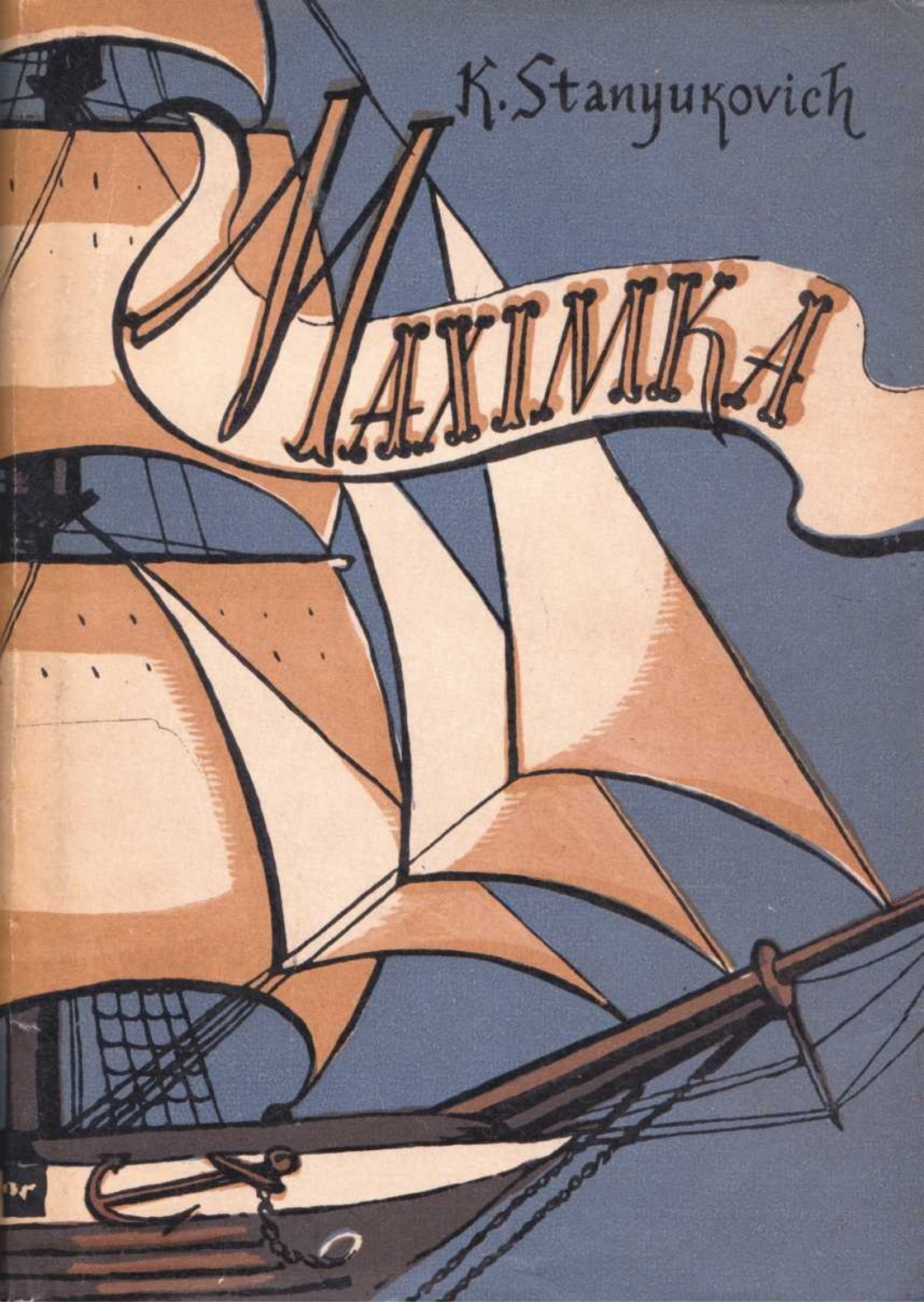
K. Stanyukovich

Maximka



К. Станюкович

Максимка

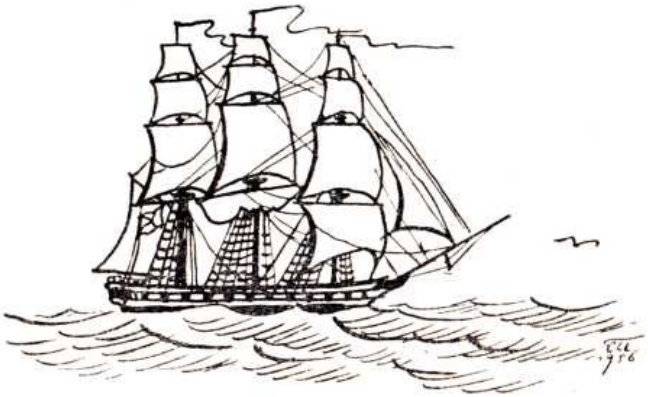
Морские рассказы

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО
ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ
Москва

K. Stanyukovich

MAXIMKA

Sea Stories



FOREIGN LANGUAGES
PUBLISHING HOUSE
MOSCOW

KONSTANTIN STANYUKOVICH

MAXIMKA

SEA STORIES

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE
Moscow

Translated from the Russian by Bernard Isaacs
Designed by Sergei Pozharsky

Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

On a misty October morning in 1860 the Russian corvette *Kalevala* set sail from Kronstadt on a foreign cruise. Among the ship's company was seventeen-year-old midshipman Konstantin Stanyukovich, a graduate of the Naval College.

A quarter of a century later he published his sea stories, which won him public recognition.

But that autumn morning when lie first left his native shores the young naval officer little suspected what an important part that cruise was to play in his life. Stanyukovich was appointed to the corvette against his own wishes. His ambition was to leave the service and enter the St. Petersburg University, But his father, an old admiral and a man of strong, harsh character, set his face against it and got his son sent on a long foreign cruise. The three-year voyage, however, failed to "knock (lie nonsense" out of Stanyukovich's head, and on returning to St. Petersburg he promptly retired with the fixed intention of taking up a literary career. The summit of that career, namely, his sea stories, was reached by a thorny path. "To make a close study of the life of the people" Stanyukovich worked for several years as a village school-teacher. In 1884 he was banished to Siberia for being connected with Russian revolutionary emigrants. It was there, in exile, that he wrote his sea stories.

The experiences of his youth came to vivid life again, as it were, in his writings.

The reader is given a picture of the hard and hazardous life of sailors at sea, he is shown shipboard life in all its aspects, from the hoisting to the lowering of the flag, he can almost hear the bells striking and see the deck officer pacing the bridge.

But the chief thing is the human element on board—the deep-sea men, wise in the ways of ships and the sea. The sea puts them through a thousand ordeals, taxes their strength, their will and muscles to the utmost. The heroes of Stanyukovich's sea stories, "those who keep the works, going," are seasoned jack tars with weather-beaten faces, who "know their onions" and are capable of feats of valour, men like Luchkin (the story "Maximka"), Chizhik ("The Nurse"), Mityushin ("Daredevil"). Side by side with these are shown brave sympathetic officers, men of honour like Luzgin ("The Nurse"), and Opolyev ("Storm-Tossed"), with the author himself always an invisible presence.

Konstantin Stanyukovich did not become an admiral, but he was, to use his own words, "one of those literary mariners who fear neither gales nor storms and do not abandon their ship in times of distress."

CONTENTS

MAXIMKA

THE NURSE

ESCAPE

MAN OVERBOARD

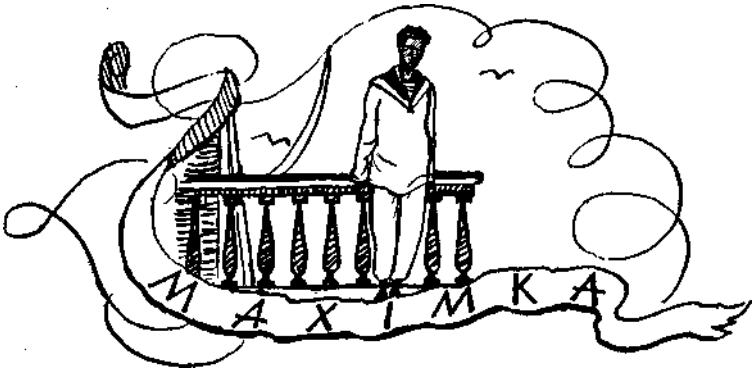
SHORTY

AMONG FRIENDS

STORM-TOSSED

DAREDEVIL

MAXIMKA



Dedicated to Tusik

I

THE ship's bell had just struck. It was six o'clock of a magnificent tropical morning in mid Atlantic. The sun, a dazzling, burning ball of gold, was quickly climbing the light blue eastern sky, whose soaring loftiness and soft transparency were flecked here and there, as with scraps of delicate lace,

by tiny snow-white wisps of clouds. It suffused the vast expanse of the ocean with radiant lustre. The sea stretched one endless, gently undulating plain from one distant blue horizon to the other. There was a sort of solemn stillness in the air. The only sound was that of the enormous light blue waves racing after each other with silver crests glittering in the sunlight, and merging together with a gentle, almost caressing murmur, as if whispering to you that, out there in the tropics, the ancient primeval ocean is always in the best of moods.

Carefully, like a tender, loving nurse, does she bear the sailing ships upon her gigantic bosom, with never a threat of storm or hurricane to sailor.

The sea was deserted.

There was not a single sail to be seen anywhere, not a single puff of smoke. Nothing but the broad ocean highway.

Now and again the bright silvery scales of a fly-fish would glitter in the sunshine; or a playful whale would show its dark back and noisily send up a fountain of water; or a black frigate-bird or snow-white albatross would soar overhead; or a little grey petrel would speed past over the water, bound for

the distant shores of Africa or America. Then again the sea would be deserted. Nothing but the murmuring waves, the sun, and sky—all bright, cheerful and kindly.

Rocking lightly on the ocean's swell, a Russian steam-driven warship, the clipper *Zabiyaka*, was swiftly heading south, each day carrying her still further from the North, a land grim and sombre, yet so dear and beloved.

A small, black, trim-looking vessel with a flowing grace of line, her three tall raking masts clothed in canvas, the *Zabiyaka*, listing slightly to leeward, was sailing at seven or eight knots, borne along by a steady, favourable north-east trade wind. She rode the waves lightly and gracefully, cleaving the sea with her prow amid swirls of tumbling foam and flying glittering spray. The waves softly licked her sides, and in her wake lay a broad ribbon of sparkling silver.

Above and below decks the usual 8 a.m. cleaning and scouring were in progress in preparation for hoisting the ship's flag and starting the day on board.

Scattered about the deck in white work shirts with wide blue collars revealing muscular, weather-tanned necks, their feet

bare and trousers tucked up above the knees, the sailors were busy washing down, scrubbing and scouring the decks, the sides of the ship, the guns, the brass-work and everything else on the *Zabiyaka* that required such attention. They worked with the meticulous care sailors always show when they are cleaning their ship, seeing to it that everything, from the trucks down to the holds, shall be spotlessly clean and that everything that can respond to brick, cloth and whiting shall be spick and span.

The sailors were working with a hearty good will, chuckling each time they heard the "bawling" bo'sun, Matveyich—a typical old sea-dog with popping grey eyes and a face red from sunburn and drinking bouts ashore—improvised a particularly talented piece of invective that struck even the accustomed ears of a Russian sailor. Matveyich did this not so much to spur the men on as to stick to form.

No one minded Matveyich's cursing. The men knew him to be a kind and decent man who always dealt fair with them and never abused his position. And they had long grown accustomed to his not being able to speak three words without

swearing. Indeed, they were often delighted by the range and variety of his vocabulary in this respect. He was a real artist at it.

Now and again a sailor would run down to the forecastle where the water-tub and the smoke-lamp stood to get a quick smoke of acrid makhorka and exchange a few words with his friends. Then he would return to his task of scrubbing and scouring, making a special effort each time he caught sight of the tall, lean figure of the chief officer, who had been nosing about in every corner of the ship since early morning.

The officer of the watch, a fair-haired young man, whose watch was from four till eight, had long since thrown off the drowsiness of his first half hour. Clad in white, his shirt open at the neck, he paced up and down the bridge, breathing in great gulps of the cool, fresh morning air which the burning sun had not yet heated. A balmy breeze pleasantly caressed the nape of his neck each time he stopped to look at the compass to see whether the helmsman was steering the right course, whether the sails were properly set or whether there were any squall clouds in the sky.

But all was well, and the officer of the watch had practically nothing to do in these blessed tropics.

And he continued his pacing of the bridge, dreaming prematurely of the end of his watch when he would be able to drink a cup of tea with those fresh warm rolls which the officers' cook was such an expert at making, providing that the vodka he got for "raising the dough" was not used by him internally.

II

All of a sudden the morning stillness was broken by the startled, unnaturally loud cry of the look-out man in the bows:

"Man in the sea!"

The sailors dropped their work, rushed to the forecastle and gazed anxiously out into the ocean.

"Where is he?" they shouted to the look-out man, a young fair-haired sailor whose face had gone as white as a sheet.

"Over there!" he said, pointing with a shaking hand. "I can't see him now. But I saw him a minute ago, boys! Hanging on to a mast, he was. Looked as if he was tied to

it," he went on excitedly, as he vainly tried to catch sight of the mast again.

The officer of the watch, startled by the look-out man's cry, jammed his binoculars to his eyes and gazed out in the direction in which he had pointed. And the signaller, with his spyglass, did the same.

"Can you see anything?" asked the young officer.

"Yes, sir. Just a bit more to the left, sir."

But just then the officer, too, caught sight of the piece of mast bobbing up and down amid the waves, with a human figure upon it.

And in a shrill, quivering voice he shouted with all the force his healthy lungs could command:

"All hands on deck! In fore and main courses! Man the boat!" And turning to the signal-man, he added excitedly: "Keep your eyes on him!" The boatswain piped the men up and bellowed: "Clear lower deck!"

The men rushed to their stations like mad.

The captain and the chief officer were already on the bridge. The other officers, most of them only half awake, hurried up to the deck, putting on their uniforms as they came.

The chief officer took command—as is the rule when "All hands on deck" is piped—and the sailors jumped to his sharp orders with feverish haste, realizing that every second was precious.

In less than seven minutes practically all the sails were furled and the *Zabiyaka* hove to, lightly rocking on the waves, and the longboat with eight oarsmen and an officer at the helm had been lowered.

"God speed!" the captain called from the bridge as the boat drew away from the ship.

The sailors rowed for all they were worth, hurrying to the castaway's rescue.

But in the seven minutes it had taken to bring the *Zabiyaka* to, she had travelled more than a mile, and mast and man could no longer be seen even through the glasses.

They had, however, noticed the direction in which the mast was floating by the compass, and in this direction they now rowed.

The eyes of all the crew of the *Zabiyaka* followed the boat, which, now rising on the crests of the waves, now sinking into the troughs between them, seemed no bigger than a nutshell.

Before long it was but a black speck.

III

On the deck silence reigned.

Now and again the sailors huddled together in the forecastle and on the quarter-deck would .exchange a few words in low voices:

"Must be some sailor off a wrecked ship."

"No ship can get wrecked in these waters. Not unless she was a pretty rotten one, she wouldn't!"

"No. But maybe she ran foul of another ship at night."

"Or caught fire, maybe."

"And this is the only man left alive!"

"Maybe the others got away in the boats and this fellow got left behind."

"I wonder whether he's alive?"

"Well, the water's warm here—he might be."

"How is it the sharks didn't get him ? These waters are full of 'em."

"Yes, boys—a seaman's life is pretty dangerous, I see," said one of the sailors, suppressing a sigh. He was a young fellow with black hair and an ear-ring in one ear,

who had only joined the navy that year and had come to the high seas straight from the plough, so to speak.

And, a sad look on his face, he took off his cap and slowly crossed himself, as if silently praying God to preserve him from a horrible death at sea.

Three-quarters of an hour of agonizing suspense followed.

Then at last the signal-man who had kept his eye glued to the spyglass, called out joyfully:

"The boat's coming back!"

When the boat drew nearer, the chief officer called to him:

"Have they got him?"

"I can't see him, sir," said the signal-man in a voice not quite so cheerful as before.

"I'm afraid they haven't found him," said the chief officer, going up to the captain.

The captain of the *Zabiyaka*, a short, thickset, sturdy man of middle age with a thick growth of greyish-black hair on his fleshy cheeks and chin, and little round eyes, keen and sharp as a hawk's, shrugged his shoulders impatiently and said with barely concealed irritation:

"I think you're wrong. There is an experienced officer in the boat and he

wouldn't have come back so soon if he hadn't found the man."

"But the signal-man can't see him in the boat."

"Maybe he's lying on the bottom. But in any case we'll soon know."

The captain started pacing the bridge, stopping every now and then to glance at the returning boat. Finally he took a look through the binoculars, and although he could not see the rescued man anywhere, the calmly cheerful expression on the coxswain’s face made him feel pretty sure that they had him aboard.

And a pleased smile lit up the captain's stern face.

A few more minutes passed, and then the boat drew alongside and was hoisted on board with its crew.

The officer stepped out, followed by the oarsmen, all red-faced and sweaty and panting with exhaustion. One of the sailors supported the prize of their quest—a little Negro boy, about ten or eleven years old, drenching wet, his little emaciated, glossy body partially covered by a tattered shirt.

The little boy could hardly stand. He was trembling all over and looked up at the sailors with an expression in his big,

sunken eyes in which joy seemed mingled with incredulity—as if he could scarcely believe that he had really been rescued.

"The poor kid was half dead when we took him off. We had a job to bring him round," the coxswain told the captain.

"Take him to the sick-bay at once!" ordered the captain.

The boy was promptly carried off to the sick-bay where they rubbed him dry and put him in a bunk and covered him with warm blankets. After that the ship's surgeon started work on him by pouring brandy down his throat, a few drops at a time.

The boy swallowed the brandy thirstily and gazing up at the doctor with imploring eyes, pointed to his mouth.

Meanwhile up on deck the sails had been set again and in no more than five minutes the *Zabiyaka* was continuing on her way and the sailors were resuming their interrupted tasks.

On all sides animated voices discussed the rescue and commented on the little boy's terribly thin, emaciated appearance.

Some of the men ran down to the sick-bay to ask how he was.

"The doctor's attending to him. He'll bring him round all right!"

An hour later topman Korshunov brought the news that the little Negro boy had fallen asleep after having eaten a few spoonfuls of hot soup.

"The cook made it specially for him, boys. A clear soup—a kind of broth, it was," Korshunov told them excitedly, doubly delighted to have a credulous audience for once (he was a notorious liar) and to have something to tell that he didn't need to lie about.

And as if seeking to make the most of such a unique opportunity, he hurried on:

"The surgeon's assistant told me that the kid was jabbering something when the doctor was feeding him. Asking for more of that soup, he was. And he tried to snatch the cup out of the doctor's hand. But the doctor wouldn't give him any mora 'He's got to go slow,' he said, 'otherwise it would kill him'." "What did the boy do then?" "Nothing; he just had to put up with it." Just then the captain's servant, Soikin, came up to where the sailors were sitting round the water-tub to smoke the stump of the captain's cigar.

Immediately all attention was transferred to him: "You haven't heard what they're going to do with the Negro kid, Soikin, have you?"

Red-haired and freckled and dressed smartly in a fine sailor's shirt of his own and canvas shoes, Soikin puffed at his cigar in dignified fashion and replied in the authoritative tone of one who possesses first-hand information:

"What are we going to do with him? Why, put him ashore at the Cape, of course, when we get there."

And after a short pause, he added scornfully:

"What else could we do with a black heathen like that? Ruddy savages—that's all they are."

"Savages or not, they're God's children same as you and me," said old Zakharich, the ship's carpenter.

His words brought a chorus of approval from the group of smokers.

"But how's the kid going to get home from the Cape? I dare say he's got a father and mother somewhere, same as everyone else."

"Oh, there are lots of niggers at the Cape. They'll find out where he conies

from," said Soikin, and, finishing the cigar stump, he went away.

"Who's he to give himself such airs? The damned flunkey!" the old carpenter growled.

IV

Next day, though still very weak, the little Negro boy had so far recovered from the shock of his experience that the fat, good-natured surgeon, smiling his huge smile, patted him on the cheek and allowed him a whole cup of broth. The boy gulped the hot liquid down and then stared up at him with a look of touching gratitude in his big, protuberant eyes, whose black pupils stood out sharply against the whites.

After this, the surgeon tried to find out how the boy had come to be in the sea and how long he had gone without food. But despite his elaborate efforts to express himself by signs and gestures, all attempts at conversation with his patient were a failure. Although the little boy evidently knew more English than the surgeon, they both murdered the few score words they

had at their disposal so as to make them quite incomprehensible.

Consequently neither could understand the other. Then the doctor sent his assistant for one of the midshipmen, a young man whom all the officers called Petya.

"You can speak good English, Petya—see if you can talk to him. I don't seem to be getting anywhere," he said, laughing. "Tell him I'll let him get up in two or three days," he added. The young midshipman sat down beside the boy's bunk and began asking him questions in English, taking care to use short phrases and pronounce each word distinctly; and the boy, if he did not understand all he said, at any rate understood a good deal of it, for he hastened to reply, stringing all sorts of words together and elaborating his meaning by means of expressive gestures.

After a rather long and difficult conversation in this strain, the midshipman gave the wardroom a rough, but fairly accurate outline of the boy's story based on his answers and gestures.

The boy had been on board an American brig, the Betsy, and belonged to the captain ("a big brute," the midshipman

threw in)" for whom he did the washing, cleaned his shoes and served him coffee-and-brandy (or rather, brandy-and-coffee). The captain called him "Boy" and the little Negro was convinced that that was his name. He had no idea who his father and mother were. The captain had bought him at the slave market at Mozambique about a year before and used to beat him every day. The Betsy had been on her way from Senegal to Rio, carrying a cargo of Negro slaves. Two days ago she had collided with another vessel (this part of the midshipman's story was based on the fact that the little boy had said "Bang! Bang! Bang!" and thumped his fist against the bulkhead) and sunk. The boy had found himself in the sea, clung on to a piece of floating mast and spent the better part of two days on it.

But far more eloquent than any words, had he been able to say them, were the surprise the boy showed at being kindly treated, his frightened look, the grateful outcast-dog expression in his eyes as he gazed at the surgeon and the midshipman, and, above all, his shiny black back, which was covered with ugly weals and was so

thin and emaciated that the ribs stuck out sharply.

The midshipman's story and the doctor's testimony made a big impression on the wardroom. One of the officers proposed that the boy be placed under the protection of the Russian Consul at Cape Town and a collection made for him amongst themselves. But that was nothing to the impression the story made on the ratings, when the midshipman's young servant, Artemy Mukhin (or Artyushka as they all called him) related it that evening to the forecastle, unable to deny himself a certain malicious pleasure in embellishing it with a few additions of his own illustrative of the utter devilishness of the American captain.

"Every blessed day he used to torment the kid. The slightest little thing—and he would hit him in the face till he bled. And then he would take his strap down from a hook—a horrible big strap made of the thickest leather—and flog him with that," he continued, carried away by the desire to paint the little boy's sufferings in the most lurid colours. '.'It made no difference to him, the swine, that it was just a poor, helpless kid, even if he was a blackie. The

poor kid's back is a mass of weals even now. It's a horrible sight, the doctor says," continued the impressionable and excitable Artyushka.

But the sailors, who had been serfs themselves and had, not so long ago, personal acquaintanceship with floggings and thrashings, did not need Artyushka's embellishments to feel deeply stirred by the boy's story and they all wished that fiend of an American captain the most horrible of fates—if the sharks had not already eaten him, that is.

"Our peasants have already been freed, but it looks like they still have serfs in America?" one of the older sailors said.

"Yes, they have."

"I can't make it out. And they call themselves a free people!"

"For them the Negroes are sort of serfs," explained Artyushka, who had picked up scraps of information on the subject in the wardroom. "And that's why they're fighting between themselves. Some of the Americans want to free the Negroes and the others, those that have serfs, won't agree to it. So they're all cutting each other's throats about it. But it's the ones that want to free the Negroes who'll win

the war, the officers say. And they'll blow all the American serf-owners to blazes," he added, not without relish.

"God will be on their side, I dare say. A Negro wants his freedom just the same as another. Even a bird's unhappy in a cage, and it's the same with a human being," said Zakharich the carpenter.

The young, dark-complexioned, first-year sailor who had made the remark about life at sea being a dangerous one, had been listening attentively to this conversation and now asked:

"So this Negro boy we've picked up will be free now, will he?"

"But, of course. What d'you think?" said Artyushka confidently, though in his heart (not having any knowledge of American laws about the rights of the individual) he wasn't absolutely sure.

But according to his own reasoning the boy would be free. That fiend of a captain had gone to feed the fishes, so what more was there to fear?

And he went on:

"All he needs now is to get a new passport when we get to the Cape. And then he can go wherever he likes."

This bringing in of the passport idea effectively dispelled his own doubts.

"That's right!" the young sailor said eagerly.

And his good-natured, ruddy face with its affectionate "puppy" eyes was lit up by a happy smile of relief on the poor little boy's account.

The short twilight was succeeded by a tropical night of entrancing loveliness. The sky's velvety ceiling became studded with millions of glittering stars. The ocean darkened save where the water sparkled here and there, close to the clipper; with a phosphorescent light.

Soon "Prayers" was piped, and after that the watch off duty brought their bed things up on deck and went to sleep.

The watchmen sat among the tackle and shortened the long hours of their vigil by chatting quietly. That night the "Negro kid" was the subject of conversation in many groups.

V

Two days later, having paid his usual 7 a.m. visit to the sickbay and examined his only patient, the doctor decided that he was now sufficiently recovered to go up on deck and have his meals with the sailors. He informed the boy of this mainly by signs, and this time the little Negro, who had now fully recovered and was as cheerful as could be and seemed already to have forgotten his recent narrow escape from death, quickly grasped his meaning. He jumped out of bed and was about to run up on deck to sit in the sun dressed just as he was. But the sight of his little black body draped in the long sailor's shirt which fitted it like a loose sack, sent the doctor into peals of laughter, while his assistant stood by giggling. The boy stopped, puzzled, wondering why the doctor was tugging at his shirt and laughing so heartily.

So he slipped out of the shirt and was about to dive through the sick-bay door naked; but the assistant held him back and the doctor, still laughing, said:

"No, no. . . ."

And he made signs to the boy to put the shirt on again.

"What are we going to clothe him in, Filippov?" said the doctor perplexedly to his assistant, a curly-haired dandyish mart of about thirty. "We never thought about that, did we."

"No, sir. But if we were to cut the shirt off at the knees now and put a belt round his waist it would look quite respective," said the feldsher. He had an unfortunate habit of using wrong words when he wanted to make his speech more ornamental, more "eddicated," as the sailors said.

"What do you mean: 'respective'?" asked the doctor, smiling.

"Just respective, sir. Everybody knows what respective is, sir," said Filippov, in an injured tone. "Neat and comfortable."

"I'm not so sure it would be 'respective,' as you say. He'd be nothing but a laughing-stock. But all the same we've got to find him something to wear for the time being till I can get the captain's permission to have something made to measure for him."

"It ought to be quite easy to get a proper suit made for him. We've some tailors among the crew. They'll make one for him."

"All right. In the meantime go and make your 'respective' suit for him."

Just at that moment, however, there was a light, respectful knock at the door.

"Who is there?" shouted the doctor. "Come in!"

A reddish, plain, swollen-looking face with a pair of light brown side whiskers, a suspiciously purple nose and bloodshot but lively and kindly eyes appeared in the doorway, followed a second later by the remainder of the small, spare, yet muscular and well-knit figure of foretop-man Ivan Luchkin.

He was a man of about forty, who had served in the navy for fifteen years and who was one of the best sailors aboard the ship and also one of the worst drunkards when ashore. For the sake of drink he had been known to sell the very clothes he stood up in and return to the clipper in his underlinen, awaiting the inevitable flogging the following morning with the utmost sang-froid.

"It's me, sir," said Luchkin in a hoarse voice shuffling his bare, sinewy feet, one rough tar-stained hand nervously fingering the seam of his trousers.

In the other hand he was carrying a small bundle.

He looked at the doctor with that shamefaced, guilty expression in his face and eyes which one often sees in those old drunkards and other men addicted to some vice or other.

"What is it, Luchkin? Are you ill?"

"No sir I've brought some clothes here for the Negro boy. Seeing that he hadn't any, I thought I'd make him some so I took his measurements and made him these. May I give them to him, sir?"

"Certainly, my dear chap. You've saved the situation, said the doctor, not a little astonished. "We were just wondering how we were going to dress the boy, but you thought of it before us."

"I did it in my spare time, sir," said the other, almost apologetically.

And with these words he opened the bundle and pulled out a little sailor's suit made of canvas. He shook it, and handing it to the astonished boy, said to him in a cheerful tone of voice, quite different from the shamefaced tone in which he spoke to the doctor, and looking affectionately at him:

"Here you are, Maximka. It's a real 'very good' uniform. Come on, put it on and let's see how it fits you."

"Why do you call him Maximka?" said the doctor, smiling.

"Why sir it was on Saint Maxim's day that we rescued mm, so he must be Maximka. Besides he hasn't any other name, and we must call him something."

The little Negro was absolutely delighted when he put on the clean new sailor's suit. Evidently he had never had clothes like these to wear before.

Luchkin surveyed his handiwork from all angles, pulled me shirt in a bit here and smoothed it out a bit there and decided that the suit was an excellent fit.

"Well, now you're coming up on deck to sit in the sunshine, Maximka. May I take him up, sir?"

The doctor, a genial smile on his face, nodded his consent, and Luchkin took the boy's hand and leading him to the forecastle presented him to the other sailors.

"This is Maximka," he said. "He's going to forget all about that brute of an American now. He knows that Russian sailors won't be unkind to him."

And patting the little boy affectionately on the back, he pointed to his curly hair and said:

"We'll make a cap for you, too, old chap, and a pair of shoes as well. All in good time."

The boy couldn't understand a word, out the friendly smiles on the sailors' weather-beaten faces promised him that they wouldn't be unkind to him. And he smiled back at them, revealing dazzling white teeth, while he basked in the hot rays of his native southern sun. - And henceforward Maximka became his name.

VI

Having presented the boy, dressed in his new sailor-suit, to his shipmates, Ivan Luchkin announced that he was going to "look after" Maximka, to take him under his special protection. This he claimed as his right by virtue of having "fitted the boy out" and given him a name.

Of how this skinny, underfed little Negro, who had suffered so much at the hands of the American captain right at the dawn of his life, aroused unusual sympathy in his

lonely heart (his own life, in youth especially, had not been one of the sweetest) and made him want to help make his days on the ship as happy as possible—of that Luchkin never said a word. Like most simple Russians he was shy of showing his feelings before other people; and it was probably for this reason that he explained his desire to "look after" the boy by saying that he was "a funny little monkey." Nevertheless he sternly declared—casting a significant look at a sailor named Petrov, who was a notorious bully and loved teasing timid "first-year" sailors—that if anyone should be such a scoundrel as to ill-treat the little "orphan," then they'd have him, Ivan Luchkin, to deal with.

"Make no mistake: I'll bash his rotten face in," he added, as if to make quite clear what "to answer for it" signified. "Cruelty to children's the wickedest sin there is. Black 'uns or white 'uns, it's all the same. A child's a child. So be kind to him," he concluded.

The other sailors readily assented to Luchkin's self-assumed guardianship of Maximka, though many of them were not a little sceptical as to whether he would be

able to cope with the difficult job he had undertaken.

How could a hardened old "boozer" and debauchee like him look after the boy?

And one of the older sailors asked, a touch of irony in his voice:

"So you're going to be a sort of nanny to the boy, are you?"

"That's right: a nanny!" Luchkin replied, smiling amiably and ignoring the men's jeering remarks and grins. "Why, do you think I'm not good enough for such a job? It's not as though he was a nobleman's son! And the kid will need some clothes. I'll have to make him another suit and some shoes and a cap. The doctor's going to try and get him some slops from the store. Let Maximka think well of us Russian sailors when we have to leave him all alone at the Cape. At any rate he won't have to go about naked."

"But how are you going to talk to the boy, Luchkin? He won't understand you and you won't understand him!"

"Oh, we'll manage all right," said Luchkin, with unaccountable conviction. "He's a bright kid, even if he is a blackie. I'll soon teach him our lingo. He'll understand me all right."

And he glanced affectionately at the little boy, who was squatting against the side of the ship and gazing round with curiosity.

Meeting his warm glance, the boy smiled back—a broad, grateful smile which showed that he understood without words that Luchkin was his friend.

At eleven-thirty all the morning's work was done and the vodka was handed out. The two boatswains and the eight petty officers formed a circle in the middle of the quarter-deck and piped the vodka distribution signal (the sailors facetiously called it "the song of the nightingale"). Luchkin, pointing to his mouth and smiling happily, told Maximka to sit down and wait till he came back, then hurried off to the quarter-deck, leaving the little boy somewhat puzzled. But he did not remain in this state for long.

The sharp smell of vodka which quickly spread about the deck, and the grave, satisfied mien of the sailors as they came back from the quarter-deck, wiping their moustaches with their rough, tar-stained hands, recalled to him how on the Betsy the men had been given a weekly tot of rum and how the captain of the Betsy

himself had drunk it every day—and more of it than was good for him, it had seemed to the boy.

Returning to Maximka in the gayest of spirits after his big glass of vodka, Luchkin patted the boy cheerfully on the back and, evidently anxious to share his pleasant impressions with him, said:

"Bon vodka! Very good schnaps that, Maximka!"

Maximka nodded sympathetically and repeated after him:

"Very goot!"

Such rapid understanding delighted Luchkin.

"Bravo, Maximka!" he exclaimed. "You understand everything! But now we must go and have our dinner. Aren't you hungry?"

And he moved his jaws up and down expressively to indicate his meaning.

And it was not difficult to understand what he meant—particularly since the boy could see some of the sailors carrying big wooden mess bowls on to the deck, out of which came an appetizing smell of cabbage soup.

So he nodded his head eloquently and his eyes sparkled with joy.

"Why, he understands everything!" said Luchkin, who was already taking something of a pride in the boy and his own ability to make himself understood by him. And taking his hand he led him off aft to have dinner.

On the deck, which was covered with tarpaulins, the men, their legs tucked under them, were sitting around in groups of twelve or so before steaming bowls of shchi (made out of sauerkraut laid up in Kronstadt), eating in silence with an air of intense concentration, the way common people usually do, and taking bites of soaked biscuit.

Stepping carefully between the eaters, Luchkin made his way with Maximka to his own mess whose station was between the mainmast and the foremast, and said to the sailors who were waiting for him before beginning:

"Well, boys, are we going to let Maximka join our mess?"

"What a question! Sit down, both of you," said Zakharich, the old ship's carpenter.

"But maybe some of the others object. What do you say, boys?" Luchkin asked again.

All to a man expressed their approval of the boy's joining their mess and moved aside to give them space.

And on all sides laughing voices exclaimed:

"Don't worry—he won't eat everything up!"

"There's enough pork to go round—even for him!"

"We've even got a spoon ready for the kid."

"I only asked because he's a Negro, you know, a heathen," said Luchkin, sitting down on the deck and making Maximka do the same. "But I reckon that in God's eyes all men are equal. Everyone wants his bite to eat. . . ."

"To be sure! The Lord loves all his children alike. He's no respecter of persons, not him. Tis only that fool Soikin who babbles about heathens!" said Zakharich. '

All the other sailors evidently shared Zakharich's opinion.

That was not surprising, considering the fine tolerance with which Russian sailors have always treated people of all races and creeds they had ever met with.

The mess received Maximka with the greatest cordiality. One sailor gave him a wooden spoon, another a soaked biscuit, and all cast friendly reassuring glances at the little boy, who was evidently not used to such kind treatment from men of white skin.

"Well, let's begin. Or the shchi will get cold," said Zakharich.

The sailors crossed themselves and began their meal.

"Why don't you start, Maximka?" said Luchkin, pointing to the boy's spoon. "It's shchi—very nice. Good soup," he added.

But the little Negro, who had not been allowed to eat with the white men aboard the Betsy and had had to eat the few leavings they gave him in some dark corner by himself, was afraid to help himself, though his little eyes gazed hungrily at the food and his mouth watered.

"The poor kid is scared. That swine of a captain must have frightened him out of his wits," said Zakharich, who sat next to the boy.

And so saying, he stroked Maximka's curly hair and put his own spoon to the boy's lips.

After this Maximka lost his fears; and a few minutes later he was putting away a hearty meal of shchi and meat and millet porridge with butter.

And every now and then Luchkin commended him, saying:

"That's right, Maximka. Very good, brother. Eat and good health to you!"

VII

The ship resounded with the snores of the sailors taking their after-dinner nap. The only ones who weren't asleep were the members of the watch and one or two handy sailors who were taking advantage of the free time to sew a pair of boots or a new shirt or to mend some article of clothing.

And the *Zabiyaka* sailed smoothly on, borne along by a steady trade wind. The watch had practically nothing to do except on those rare occasions when a storm-cloud crept up and all sails had to be taken in to meet the oncoming squall and its torrents of rain with stripped masts, that is to say: with the least possible area of resistance.

But the horizon was quite clear this day, with nowhere a sign of that tiny patch of misty grey which, rapidly growing, finally becomes a mighty storm-cloud, blotting out both sun and horizon. A violent gust then heels your ship over; a deluge of rain whips the deck, soaking everyone to the skin, and then the squall rushes past as quickly as it came. A sudden roar, a downpour, and then all is quiet again.

Once again the sun shines dazzlingly on high, quickly drying the deck, the rigging, the sails and the sailors' shirts. Once again a serene blue sky gazes down on a calm, caressing sea, and the ship pursues her voyage with sails all set, borne along as before by a smooth, steady trade wind.

Now, too, all was peace and quiet aboard the clipper. The crew was "at rest." It was an established custom that the sailors at such times were not disturbed except in case of emergency.

Sitting in the shade of the foremast, Luchkin was not sleeping like the rest of the crew—much to the surprise of the watch, for he had the reputation of being a heavy sleeper.

Humming softly to himself, he was busy sewing a pair of canvas shoes, now and

again glancing down at Maximka (who was sprawling on the deck beside him fast asleep, "his feet darkly set off by his new white trousers) to see whether the measurements he had taken right after dinner had been correct.

Evidently he became satisfied that they were so, for after a while he continued his work without further attention to the little black feet.

A warm, joyful feeling came over the hardened old drunkard at the thought that he was going to make a "tiptop" pair of shoes for the poor homeless orphan, and everything else he needed. Involuntarily he fell to thinking about his own past life which presented a dreary picture of endless drinking bouts and resultant floggings.

And he concluded to himself, not unreasonably, that had he not been such a fearless topman, whose daring feats had delighted every captain and chief officer under whom he had served, he would long ago have been consigned to the convict labour gang.

"Yes, that's why they let me off," he said aloud, and for some reason he sighed. "That's where the shoe pinches!" Whether

the "pinch" referred to the fact that he was the ship's most notorious drunkard (who had never been known to go further ashore —except at Kronstadt—than the nearest tavern); or to the fact that only because of his powers as a topman he had not been made to taste the convict gang, was not clear. One thing was obvious, though: the idea of some kind of "pinch" in his life caused Luchkin to interrupt his singing for a few minutes and set him thinking, till finally he said:

"And Maximka will need a sailor's shirt, too. What is a sailor without a shirt!"

Taking advantage of the rest hour, Luchkin cut out the soles and the uppers for Maximka's shoes. The soles were of brand-new leather from the store, which Luchkin had bought on credit that morning from one of his shipmates, a thrifty sailor who wore boots of his own making.

Knowing how difficult it was for him to hang on to his money (especially ashore), Luchkin arranged that the debt should be paid for him by the bo'sun, who was to deduct it from his pay.

When the whistle sounded, followed by the bawling voice of the boatswain Vasily Yegorovich (Yegorich, as the sailors called

him), Luchkin woke the sleeping boy. Even though he was only a passenger, he ought to live like the rest of the crew did, he reflected, or there might be trouble with Yegorich. He knew Yegorich to be a "decent chap" who didn't use his fists "unless he had good reason," but all the same, if he flew in a temper he might fetch the kid one for some "breach of routine." So it would be as well to teach ship's routine to the Negro from the start.

"Time to get up, Maximka," he said kindly, shaking the little boy by the shoulder.

Maximka opened his eyes and stretched, and seeing the other sailors already on their feet, jumped up quickly and gazed at Luchkin with a scared look of doglike devotion.

"Don't be afraid, Maximka. What a silly kid you are, afraid of everything! Look, these are going to be some shoes for you."

And he pointed at his feet and at the canvas uppers of the shoes in his hand.

The boy had no idea what he was speaking about, but he probably sensed that they were kind words that he was saying, for he gave a broad grin. And he followed Luchkin trustfully down to the

crew's quarters, looking on curiously as Luchkin stowed the half-made shoes away among the clothes and the linen in his sea-chest.

Still not understanding what he was talking about, but grinning back happily, he watched Luchkin take off his cap and point first at it and then at Maximka's head and try painstakingly to explain to him that he too was to have such a cap with a white top to it and a ribbon round the side.

Yet the Negro felt with all his little heart that these white men, who spoke quite a different language from the white men of the Betsy, were kindly disposed towards him, especially this sailor with the tow-coloured hair and red nose—which reminded him of cayenne pepper—who had given him that wonderful suit, treated him to all sorts of good things to eat and looked at. him in a gentle, affectionate way that he had not known since babyhood when the eyes of some dimly remembered black-skinned woman had looked at him like that.

Those kind, loving eyes had remained in his memory, dimly connected in some way with the picture of lofty palm-trees and huts roofed with banana leaves. Whether they were something he'd dreamed about

or whether they were a memory of his babyhood, he did not know, of course. But sometimes they appeared to him in his dreams and comforted him. And now he was seeing those kind, loving eyes not in dreams, but in reality.

And altogether his life on the clipper now was just like those happy dreams he had had—so different it was from the days of constant fear and suffering that he'd known before.

When Luchkin, abandoning his attempts to explain about the cap, burrowed into his chest and presented Maximka with a lump of sugar, the little boy was quite overwhelmed. He took one of the sailor's rough, horny hands in his own and stroked it gently and timidly, at the same time looking up at him with an expression of touching gratitude in his face—the expression of a downtrodden creature suddenly warmed by kindness. This gratitude shone in his face and his eyes, it showed itself in the tremor in his little voice as, in the heat of emotion, he murmured one or two guttural-sounding words in his native tongue before putting the sugar in his mouth.

"Well, you're an affectionate little beggar, I must say. Not used to friendly words, poor kid," said Luchkin in the gentlest tones his gruff voice was capable of and patted Maximka's chesk. "Go on, eat your sugar. It's nice!" he told him.

And in this way, in this dark corner of the orlop, a bond of friendship between the two, the veteran sailor and the little homeless Negro boy, was formally sealed. And each, it appeared, was very satisfied with the other.

"We shall have to teach you Russian, Maximka. Otherwise we'll never make out what you're jabbering about. But come, it's time to go on deck for gunnery drill. You can come and watch us."

They went up on deck and soon the drum sounded the signal for gunnery drill. Maximka, leaning against a mast so as not to be knocked off his feet by the sailors as they rushed to their stations, was at first rather frightened; but he soon lost his fears and watched, fascinated, the men run in the guns, quickly thrust the sponge into the barrels and then run them out through the ports again and freeze motionless beside them. He thought they were going to fire the guns and wondered what they

were going to fire at, since there were no sails in sight. He had once had experience of being under fire and had even seen a cannon-ball fall only just short of the Betsy's stern as she scurried away, beating along the wind in full canvas, to escape some three-masted ship that was pursuing the slaver with her living cargo. He had seen the terrified look on the sailors' faces and heard the Betsy's captain cursing and swearing until the pursuing ship began to drop astern, and he hadn't realized, of course, that the ship that had fired on them was an English man-of-war specially sent to capture "slave-traders" and had therefore rejoiced like the others when the Betsy outsailed her pursuer, the cruel captain thus escaping being hung on the yard-arm for his vile traffic in slaves.

But no shots were fired much as Maximka looked forward to it. But then he could listen, enthralled, to the roll of the drum, and watch Luchkin, who was captain of one of the guns and stood beside it, every now and then bending down to sight it.

The gunnery drill delighted Maximka; but he was hardly less delighted by the tea to which Luchkin treated him after the drill

was over. At first he was rather astonished at the sight of the sailors sipping what appeared to be cups of hot water, nibbling sugar and sweating profusely in the process. But when Luchkin gave him a cup, too, and a lump of sugar with it, he quite enjoyed it and drank two cupfuls with relish.

As for his first Russian lesson, which Luchkin gave him that same evening as soon as the afternoon's heat had worn off and "one's head worked better," it must be admitted that it did not augur much success; and indeed Luchkin's painstaking but unavailing efforts to explain to the pupil that his name was Maximka and that of his teacher was Luchkin provided not a little amusement for the other sailors.

Luchkin, though he was no teacher, was so patient and gentle in his efforts to give the boy at least a grounding of Russian, starting with names, that the most qualified pedagogue, who would scarcely have had so many difficulties to contend with, might have envied him.

He contrived various ingenious methods for achieving his end and proceeded to put them into execution.

First he poked his finger into the boy's chest and said, "Maximka"; then pointed to himself and said, "Luchkin." This method, though repeated several times, not having any result, he walked away a short distance and called out "Maximka!" from there. Maximka grinned but still failed to grasp the thing. So then Luchkin had another idea. He got one of the sailors to call out Maximka's name, and when he did so, he himself, with the satisfied air of one certain of success, pointed at the boy and, to make things double sure, shook him gently by the collar of his shirt. But alas! the boy laughed merrily, evidently interpreting the shaking as an invitation to dance. For he promptly jumped up and started to execute a lively dance—much to the delight of the onlooking sailors and even of Luchkin himself.

When his dance was over, Maximka could see that the sailors had been pleased by it, for many of them patted him on the back, shoulders and head, and said, laughing heartily: "Bravo, Maximka! Good!"

It is difficult to say what success further attempts by Luchkin to teach the boy his name would have met with. He was just .about to resume the lesson when the

midshipman who spoke English appeared on the scene and greatly simplified matters by speaking to the boy in English and telling him that his name was not "Boy" but "Maximka" and that his friend's name was Luchkin.

"Now he knows the name you've given him," he said to Luchkin.

"Thank you very much, sir," said Luchkin, delighted. "I've tried all sorts of ways. He's a bright kid, but I just couldn't make him understand."

"Well, he understands now all right. Ask him and see."

"Maximka."

The little boy pointed to himself.

"That's fine, sir! And who is Luchkin?" Luchkin asked the boy.

Maximka pointed to him.

And they both laughed heartily, and the other sailors joined in and said:

"Your little Negro's starting on his eddication!"

After that the lesson was easy sailing. Luchkin pointed to various objects and called them by their names, doing as much murder to the words as they would permit, convinced that in this "simplified" form they would sound more foreign and

therefore be easier to remember. And by the time supper was piped Maximka could already repeat quite a number of words after him.

"Bravo, Luchkin! You're getting on fine! At this rate he'll know quite a lot of Russian by the time we reach the Cape!" said the other ratings.

"You bet he will! It'll be at least twenty days before we reach the Cape. And Maximka's a clever boy!"

At the word "Maximka" the boy looked at Luchkin.

"He knows his name all right! Come along, old chap, we'll go and have supper."

After supper, when prayers had been said and the beds handed out for the night, Luchkin put the boy to bed on the deck beside him and, grateful and happy, Maximka lay down contentedly on his sailor's mattress with a pillow beneath his head and a big blanket to cover him—all these things having been procured by Luchkin from the mate.

"Now go to sleep, Maximka! We have to get up early tomorrow!"

But Maximka was already dropping off, after drowsily repeating (not at all badly for

a first lesson) "Maximka" and "Lyuchiki," as he pronounced his friend's name.

Luchkin made the sign of the cross over the sleeping child and very soon he himself was snoring loudly.

At 12 o'clock he rose to go on watch and climbed aloft together with Leontiev, the foretop-man.

They squatted there, after seeing that everything was in order, and started chatting to keep awake. They talked about Kronstadt and about former captains they had had and then relapsed into silence for a while.

"I say, Leontiev," said Luchkin suddenly, "have you really never been a vodka-drinker?"

Staid, sober, diligent Leontiev, who admired Luchkin for his seamanship, but at the same time rather looked down on him for his weakness for alcohol, answered emphatically:

"Never!"

"D'you mean to say you've never touched the stuff?"

"Now and again on a holiday I've had a glass, but that's all."

"That's why you always get your vodka ration in money?"

"Money's more useful, old chap. Back in Russia, when we're discharged, money will always come in useful."

"That's true enough."

"But what makes you speak about vodka, Luchkin?"

"Because I think you're a lucky chap."

Luchkin was silent for a little and then he said:

"Is it true that there's a charm against the booze?"

"So I heard. One of our petty officers on the Kobchik—he cured a man of it. He knew some magic word. And there's a chap on the *Zabiyaka* who can do it, too."

"Who?"

"Zakharich, the carpenter. But he keeps it a secret. It's not everyone that he'll do it for. But you don't mean to tell me that you're going to give up drinking, do you?" asked Leontiev, mockingly.

"I don't know about giving it up . . . but I'd like to stop selling my clothes for drink."

"Why don't you try drinking in moderation?"

"I have tried. But it doesn't work, old chap. The moment I get at the stuff I'm done for! It seems it's my fate!"

"Fate has nothing to do with it—you haven't the sense, that's what!" said Leontiev sternly. "A man should be able to control himself. But have a word with Zakharich about it. Maybe he'll do it for you. . . . Only I doubt it will work with you," he added mockingly.

"That's what I think too. Nothing could cure me!" said Luchkin, and for some reason he smiled, as if he was rather proud that he couldn't be cured.

VIII

Three weeks passed. The *Zabiyaka* had almost reached Cape Town, but was not able to make the harbour. A stiffish headwind was blowing "right in the teeth," as seamen say, sometimes reaching gale strength, and this prevented her from standing in. And wind and swell were so violent that it would have been in vain to try to get in under steam. It would have been a mere waste of coal.

So awaiting a change in the weather, the *Zabiyaka* lay off shore with reefed topsails, rolling heavily on the ocean swell.

Six or seven days passed in this way.

Then at last the wind dropped, and the ship, with smoke puffing out of her white funnel, steamed into Cape Town harbour.

Needless to relate how glad the sailors were.

Yet there was one member of the clipper's crew who not only was not glad that they were coming into Cape Town, but became increasingly pensive and melancholy as the ship drew nearer to shore.

This was Luchkin, about to be separated from Maximka.

During the month that Luchkin—contrary to his shipmates' expectations—had so carefully looked after Maximka, he had grown very attached to him, and the little Negro, for his part, had grown no less attached to him. The two could understand each other quite well now, for Luchkin had proved an excellent teacher and Maximka had been a bright, intelligent pupil and could now scrape together enough Russian to make himself understood. The better they got to know each other the better friends they became. Maximka now had two changes of clothes, a pair of shoes, a cap and a sailor's knife on a strap. He proved to be a bright, merry-hearted boy

and was soon a favourite with the entire crew. Even Yegorich the boatswain, who could not abide "useless passengers," was very well disposed towards the boy, since Maximka always pulled a rope with the others, and altogether did all he could to be of use on board and "work his passage" as you might say. He went aloft as nimbly as a monkey and showed not the slightest fear when there was a storm, and altogether was in every respect a real sailor-boy.

Extremely gentle and good-natured, he often used to amuse the sailors by dancing in the forecastle or singing his native songs in a clear ringing voice. Everybody made a great fuss of him, and Artyushka, the midshipman's servant, often used to bring him cakes and other titbits left over from the wardroom table.

Needless to say he was utterly devoted to Luchkin and followed him about wherever he went like a little dog. He used to climb to the top to share his watches with him and sit with him at the look-out station in the bows, and he tried very hard to learn to say the Russian words which Luchkin taught him.

Already the steep cliffs of Cape Town harbour were drawing near. The *Zabiyaka* was coming in at full speed and was expected to anchor in the harbour at about noon.

It was a wonderfully bright, sunny morning, yet Luchkin looked anything but cheerful and was polishing the gun he was working on with furious zeal. Beside him, assisting where he could, stood Maximka.

"We'll be soon saying good-bye, Maximka lad. They're going to put you ashore at the Cape. What else can we do with you?"

The boy, who had never given a thought to the future and who could not understand much of what Luchkin said, sensed all the same from the melancholy expression on his face that his words had been sad ones, and his lively, sensitive face, quick to reflect his thoughts and feelings, clouded suddenly and he said:

"Me no understand, Lyuchika."

"They're going to put you ashore, old chap. I'll be sailing on, but Maximka will stay here."

And he tried to explain his meaning by signs.

Evidently the boy understood him now, for he seized Luchkin's hand and said to him in a voice of entreaty:

"'Me not send shore. . . . Me stay here . . . Maximka, Lyuchika, Lyuchika, Maximka. Me Russian sailor. . . . Yes, yes. . . ."

At these words a sudden idea struck Luchkin.

"Would you like to be a Russian sailor, Maximka?"

"Yes, yes," said Maximka again, nodding his little head vigorously.

"That would be fine, now! Why ever didn't I think of it before? 1 must speak to the others about it, and we can get the bo'sun to put it before the chief officer."

A few minutes later he was talking to the men in the forecastle:

"I say, boys! Maximka doesn't want to leave us! Let's ask permission for him to stay on board as a sailor. What do you say?"

The sailors expressed their liveliest approval of the idea.

So Luchkin went to the boatswain and asked him to convey the men's request to the chief officer.

"Please do us that favour, Yegorich," he added. "Ask the chief officer. Tell him Maximka wants to stay and all that. What could he do if we left him all alone on the Cape? Anything might happen to the poor Rid there. It would be a shame, Yegorich. He's a good, honest little boy, now isn't he?"

"Well yes, I'll report it. Maximka's tidy little boy. Only I'm not so sure the captain will agree to having a Negro aboard a Russian man-of-war—that's the trouble."

"That needn't be any trouble, Yegorich. We could make him a Christian." "How do you mean?"

"We could have him baptized into our Church and then he'd be a Russian Negro, see!"

The idea appealed to Yegorich and he promised to convey the men's request to the chief officer forthwith. The latter heard the boatswain out, then said: "I suppose Luchkin's at the back of this." "It's not only Luchkin, sir—the whole crew is making this request. What will become of him if we put him ashore here? The men feel sorry for him. We could make him a cabin-boy if it comes to that, sir! He's a good little worker, if I may say so. And if we were to baptize

him, then we could save his soul." The chief officer promised to speak to the captain about it. When the captain came on deck for the hoisting of the flag, the chief officer told him of the men's request.

At first the captain was for refusing it point-blank; but after thinking it over (and probably thinking of his own children at home), he changed his mind and said:

"All right. He can stay. We'll make him a cabin-boy. And when we get back to Kronstadt we'll do something for him there. Really—why should he be put ashore, especially if he wants to stay! And let Luchkin continue to be his tutor. . . . Strange, isn't it—a drunkard like that, yet he's devoted to the boy. The surgeon tells me he's made all his clothes for him."

When the forecastle heard that permission had been given for Maximka to remain on board there was great rejoicing. Gladdest of all, of course, were Luchkin and Maximka.

At one o'clock the ship anchored in the roads of Cape Town, and next morning the men of the first watch were given shore leave. Among those allowed ashore were Luchkin and Maximka.

"Mind you don't sell Maximka for drink!" laughed Yegorich, as they left the clipper.

This shot evidently went home, for Luchkin replied:

"How do you know, maybe, because of Maximka, I'll come back quite sober tonight!"

Although he was dead drunk as usual that night, yet for once he came back in all his clothes, greatly to everyone's astonishment. As it turned out afterwards, he owed this entirely to Maximka, who, seeing how hard his friend was drinking, had run off to a neighbouring tavern and fetched some other Russian sailors who picked Luchkin up and carried him back to the boat, with Maximka ever at his side.

Luchkin kept babbling drunkenly all the way:

"Where's Maximka? Bring me Maximka. I haven't sold him for drink, boys. He's my greatest pal. Where is Maximka?"

And when he found Maximka by his side he calmed down and fell asleep.

A week later the *Zabiyaka* left the Cape of Good Hope, and soon afterwards Maximka was solemnly baptized and re-christened Maximka, with Zabiyakin (from the name of the ship) for his surname.

Three years later he came to Kronstadt aboard the *Zabiyaka* a full-grown boy of fourteen and able, thanks to the pains Petya the midshipman had taken with him, both to read and write.

The captain kept his promise and got him a place in the Kronstadt training school for sick-berth attendants. And Luchkin, discharged from the navy, settled in Kronstadt so as to be near his pet. He devoted himself heart and soul to Maximka's welfare, and thanks to him even gave up selling his clothes to get drink and learnt to drink "in moderation."

THE NURSE

I

ONE spring morning, in Kronstadt's docks, where men had been hard at work since early dawn fitting out ships for their summer voyages, Ivan Kokorin, Captain Luzgin's cook-servant, entered the dining-room of the captain's small flat and, straightening out the greasy frock-coat he'd just thrown on over his sailor's

uniform, announced in a soft, wheedling tenor voice:

"The new servant has come, Madam. The master has sent him up from the naval depot."

The captain's wife, a young, comely blonde with big grey eyes, was sitting beside the samovar, drinking coffee, clad in a light blue dressing-gown, with a dainty cap on her head covering her hair which, not yet properly done, was caught up in a loose bun. Beside her on a high chair, sipping milk with a disinterested air and kicking his heels, sat a little dark-eyed boy of about seven or eight, in a red-coloured shirt with gold trimmings; and behind her, holding a baby in her arms, stood a young, thin, timid-looking girl, barefooted and dressed in a shabby cotton dress. This last was Anyutka, Mme Luzgina's one serf, who had been apportioned to her (when quite a child) in her wedding dowry.

"Do you know who he is, Ivan?" asked Mme Luzgina, looking up.

"No, Madam, I don't." "What does he look like?"

"Just a common sailor, Madam. No manners at all!" said Ivan, pursing up his big, red lips contemptuously.

There was certainly nothing sailorly about his own person. A man of about thirty-five, smooth, pink, and plump of body, with red oiled hair, freckled, clean-shaven cheeks and little button eyes, he had the pert manner of a professional domestic accustomed to living with gentlefolk.

Kokorin had been an officer's servant from the day he joined the navy and had never once been to sea.

He had been working for the Luzgins for three years now, and notwithstanding Mme Luzgina's exacting ways, contrived to please her.

"Does he look the drinking kind?" Mme Luzgina went on. She had a horror of drunken servants.

"He doesn't look it. But who can tell? But won't you see him and question him yourself, Madam?" "All right. Send him in."

Darting an amorous look at Anyutka, Ivan went out. Anyutka frowned.

II

In the doorway appeared a short, stocky, dark-complexioned sailor with a brass ring

in one ear. He looked about fifty, Dressed in a tightly buttoned uniform, the stiff collar of which cut into the folds of his reddish-brown neck, he had a clumsy, awkward, unprepossessing air about him.

He stepped gingerly into the room and stood to attention as sailors do before an officer, staring motionless at Mme Luzgina, his big, hairy hands, knotted and tar-stained, pressed against the seams of his trousers.

From his right hand two fingers were missing. This swarthy sailor with his ugly, pock-marked, brick-coloured face, overgrown with a black moustache and side whiskers and big bushy eyebrows, which gave him a somewhat ferocious appearance, evidently made a bad impression on Mme Luzgina.

"Couldn't Vasily have found someone better!" she mentally scolded her husband for his unhappy choice.

She looked at the sailor again as he stood motionless before her, noticing his slightly crooked legs and huge sprawling feet, the absence of two fingers from his right hand, and—above all —his broad, fleshy nose, the high colour of which aroused her worst suspicions.

"Good morning!" she brought out at length in a dry tone of voice, her large grey eyes becoming stern.

"Good morning, Your Honour!" roared the newcomer in a deep, bass voice ill-adjusted to the room's small dimensions.

"Don't shout!" said Mme Luzgina, looking behind her anxiously to see if he had frightened the baby, "You're not in the street now. Speak quietly."

"Yes, Your Honour," answered the sailor, lowering his voice considerably.

"Quietly, I said. Can't you speak in a normal tone of voice?"

"I'll do my best, Your Honour," said the sailor in a low, disconcerted voice—he could see that his future mistress was going to be a "nagger."

"What is your name?"

"Fedos, Your Honour."

Mme Luzgina winced as if she had toothache. What an awful name!

"And your surname?"

"Chizhik, Your Honour!"

"What did you say?"

"Chizhik. . . . Fedos Chizhik!" *(Chizhik, a siskin.—Tr.)*

The name so ill-suited his appearance that both Mme Luzgina and the boy (who

had long since abandoned his milk and fixed a pair of curious, rather frightened eyes on the hairy stranger) burst out laughing, while Anyutka giggled behind her sleeve.

Fedos Chizhik's grave, strained expression relaxed into the most good-natured of smiles, showing that he, too, thought his name a bit of a joke.

The boy caught the smile, which quite transformed the sailor's rugged features. The man's black eyebrows and moustache and side whiskers lost their fears for him. He suddenly had the feeling that this sailor was a good fellow and that he liked him. Even the smell of tar that hung about him now seemed to have something pleasant and important about it. And he said to his mother:

"Let Chizhik stay, Mummy!"

"Taisez-vous!" said Mme Luzgina.

And, resuming her stern air, she continued the questioning:

"Where have you been a servant before?"

"I've never been in that station of life before, Your Honour."

"Never been a servant at all?"

"No, Your Honour, never. I've always been in the navy. A regular sailor, as you might say, Your Honour."

"Stop calling me 'Your Honour.' It's ridiculous. Call me Madam."

"Yes, Your Hon—beg pardon—Ma'am."

"You've never been an orderly either?"

"No, Ma'am, never."

"Then why are they making you a servant now?"

"On account of my fingers, Ma'am," said Fedos, looking down at his right hand from which the thumb and forefinger were missing. "They got torn off by a halyard last summer aboard the Kobchik."

"My husband knows you then, does he?"

"Yes, Ma'am; I've served three years under him on the Kobchik."

This news seemed to reassure Mme Luzgina a little. She asked him in a milder tone:

"Do you drink vodka?"

"Yes, Ma'am," Chizhik admitted.

"And . . . do you drink a lot?"

"In moderation, Ma'am."

Mme Luzgina shook her head doubtingly.

"Then why is your nose so red?" she asked.

"Twas always so, Ma'am."

"It's not from drinking vodka?"

"It didn't ought to be, Ma'am. I never get tight even if I do have a drink on a holiday."

"An officer's servant mustn't drink. Not a drop. I can't stand drunkards! Do you understand?" Mme Luzgina said imperiously.

Fedos threw a somewhat surprised glance at the lady and since the question called for an answer, he murmured:

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Well, remember what I said."

Fedos was diplomatically silent.

"Did my husband tell you what your duties would be?"

"No, Ma'am. He just said I was to report to you."

"You are to look after the young master here," said Mme Luzgina, indicating the boy. "You'll be his nurse." Fedos gave the boy a friendly smile, and the boy smiled back.

Mme Luzgina proceeded to enumerate his duties: he was to wake the young master up at eight, and dress him; stay at his side all day and guard him like the apple of his eye; take him for walks and in his spare time wash his clothes. . . .

"Do you know how to wash clothes?"

"We sailors always do our own washing," said Fedos, thinking Mme Luzgina pretty stupid to ask such a question.

"I'll explain your duties to you more fully afterwards. But tell me now: do you understand what is wanted of you?"

The shadow of a smile flitted across the sailor's face. "Anyone could understand that!" it seemed to say.

"Yes, Ma'am, I understand," he replied, somewhat discouraged at the solemn way in which she spoke to him and the lengthiness of her "explanations," and concluding that she must be pretty silly to waste all that breath.

"Are you fond of children?"

"Of course, Ma'am. Everybody loves children!"

"Well, go back to the kitchen and wait there till my husband returns. I will let you know then definitely whether I'll take you on or not."

Like a good sailor who knew his place and his duty to his superiors, Fedos with a smart left-about-turn marched out of the dining-room, and went into the courtyard to get a smoke.

III

"Well, Shura, I believe you've taken a fancy to this loutish fellow?"

"Yes, Mummy, I have. Please let him stay." "First we must find out from your Daddy whether he's a drunkard."

"But Chizhik told you—he isn't."

"One can't believe what he says."

"Why not?"

"He's a sailor . . . a peasant. . . . They don't mind how many lies they tell."

"Does he know stories? Will he play with me?" "I suppose he does. And he'll have to play with you."

"But Anton didn't and he never played with me."

"Anton was a lazy, drunken good-for-nothing!"

"Was that why you used to send him to the depot, Mummy?"

"Yes."

"And did they flog him there?" "Yes, darling, they did. To reform him." "He was always very sore when he came back. Wouldn't even speak to me."

"That's because Anton was a bad man. Punishment didn't make him any better." "Where is Anton now?" "I don't know. . . ."

The boy became silent, lost in thought. Finally, in a serious tone of voice, he said:

"Mammy, darling, please don't send Chizhik to be flogged, like you did Anton. If you do, he won't tell me stories either — and he'll scold me, like Anton did."

"Did he dare to scold you?"

"He said I was 'the Devil's own spawn.' Is that something bad?"

"Oh, the scoundrel! Why didn't you tell me this before?" "You would have sent him to be flogged if I had, and I was sorry for him. . . ."

"People like him don't deserve being sorry for. And you mustn't hide things from your mother, Shura."

At the mention of Anton's name, Anyutka the maid stifled a sigh.

That young, reckless, curly-headed sailor, who had been so fond of drinking and, when drunk, became so boastful and saucy, had left the pleasantest memories in her mind of the two months he'd been with them.

She had been in love with Anton and had shed many a tear when the captain, at the insistent request of his wife, had sent him to the naval depot to be flogged—which happened not infrequently. She could

never forget how beautifully he had played the balalaika and sung; what audacious eyes he had had; and how fearless he'd been, even of Mme Luzgina,—especially when he'd been drinking! She had nursed her love for him in secret, knowing its hopelessness. For Anton had never paid the slightest attention to her, and had spent his free time running after the housemaid next door.

How much nicer he had been than that mean, ginger-haired Ivan, the tale-teller, who now persecuted her with his attentions! And didn't he have a high opinion of himself, too, the ginger devil! She couldn't go into the kitchen without him making passes at her.

Just then the baby in her arms woke up and started to cry.

Anyutka walked quickly up and down the room, rocking it in her arms and singing to it in a clear, melodious voice.

The child, however, did not cease crying. Anyutka darted frightened glances at her mistress.

"Give me the child, Anyutka! You can't nurse it at all!" Mme Luzgina exclaimed irritably, and with a plump white hand she undid the front of her dressing-gown.

Lying at its mother's breast, the child at once ceased its crying and set to sucking greedily, gazing up happily out of tear-filled eyes.

"Clear the table; and be careful you don't break anything."

Anyutka rushed over to the table and began to clear the coffee things with the foolish haste of a frightened underling.

IV

Soon after 12, when the naval dockyard where the Kobchik was being fitted out had knocked off for lunch, Vasily Mikhailovich Luzgin, a stoutish, dignified-looking man of about 40, with a bald head and a slight paunch, came home tired and hungry.

Lunch was on the table when he arrived. The captain gave his wife and son a hearty kiss, tossed off two glasses of vodka with salted herring for a snack, then attacked a beefsteak with the zest of a famished man. And well he might! Since five in the morning, when he had drunk a couple of glasses of tea, he had not eaten a thing.

Having appeased his hunger, he looked up at his pretty young wife, who was now smartly dressed, and asked:

"Well, Marusya—what do you think of the new servant?" "What do you expect me to think of a man like that?" Vasily Mikhailovich's little dark, good-natured eyes clouded for a moment.

"A rough, coarse fellow. You can tell at once he's never been a servant in his life!"

"He hasn't, it's true. But all the same, Marusya, he's an honest, reliable fellow. I know him."

"And that suspicious nose of his. I'm sure he's a drunkard," Mme Luzgina continued.

"He drinks his glass or two, but he's not a drunkard, I assure you, Marusya," said the captain, in an exceedingly gentle, cautious tone.

But knowing that his wife could not bear being contradicted —and regarded it as a deadly insult—he hastened to add:

"But just as you wish, dear. If you don't like him, I'll find you someone else."

"That would only mean more delay, and Shura has no one to take him out. No, let him stay. We'll see what he's like, this treasure of yours—this Chizhik!"

"The name certainly is a funny one!" said the captain, laughing.

"And his Christian name, too . . . a real peasant name—Fedos!"

"You could call him by some other name, dear. But really, Marusya, you won't regret it if we employ him. He's an honest, conscientious fellow. What a magnificent topman he was! But just as you wish. Your word is law, dear!"

Maria Ivanovna did not need her husband's protestations to assure her that he would do whatever she wished. The bluff, simple-hearted Vasily Mikhailovich was utterly devoted to his beautiful young wife and had never, in the course of their ten years together, even thought of throwing off the yoke of her rule.

Notwithstanding, she felt it necessary to say:

"I don't like this Chizhik of yours, but since you wish it, he shall stay."

"But Marusya, why? If you don't want him —"

"He shall stay!" Maria Ivanovna said with finality.

So all that remained for Captain Luzgin was to smile gratefully at his wife for showing such deference to his wishes. And

Shura was delighted that Chizhik was to be his nurse.

The new servant was called into the dining-room again. He stood at attention in the doorway, as before, and listened with no particular show of enthusiasm to Mme Luzgina's announcement that he was to remain.

He was to bring his belongings the next morning, she said, and share the room of Ivan, the cook.

"And this afternoon go to the bath-house and get that black off your hands," she added, glancing distastefully at the sailor's rough, tar-stained hands.

"Begging your pardon, Ma'am, but it won't come off all at once. . . it's tar!" Fedos explained, glancing at his former commander as if appealing to him to corroborate the truth of his statement. "You explain to her," his glance seemed to say. "She doesn't understand."

"It will come off gradually. He'll get them clean in time."

"Yes, Your Honour, I will."

"And don't shout like that, Feodosy. I've told you that several times already."

"You hear what she says, Chizhik—you mustn't shout!" Captain Luzgin repeated.

"No, Your Honour."

"Be as good a nurse as you've been a sailor, Chizhik. Take good care of my son."

"Yes, Your Honour."

"And you mustn't touch vodka," Mme Luzgina put in.

"Yes, old chap—be careful there," said Vasily Mikhailovich lamely, feeling it was futile as well as hypocritical to say such a thing, yet at the same time confident that Chizhik would never exceed moderation in his drinking.

"And another thing, Feodosy . . . I'm going to call you Feodosy, by the way."

"As Madam pleases."

"You mustn't use any bad language here—especially when you're with my boy. And if you hear any sailormen swearing in the streets you must take him out of earshot."

"Understand, Chizhik—you mustn't swear. You must remember you're not in the forecastle any longer—you're in a lady's house."

"Yes, Your Honour!"

"And you must always do just what your mistress says. Whatever she tells you to do, you must obey. Never try to answer back."

"No, Your Honour."

"And Heaven preserve you from ever being insolent or rude to your mistress. For the slightest rudeness I'll have you flayed! Do you understand?" Vasily Mikhailovich said sternly and resolutely.

"Yes, Your Honour."

There was a short silence.

"Thank God, it's over!" Chizhik thought.

"Do you want him for anything else, Marusya?"

"No."

"All right then, Chizhik, you can go now. Tell the sergeant-major at the depot that I am engaging you here," the captain said in quite a genial tone, from which no one would have supposed that only a few moments before he had been threatening to have him "flayed."

Chizhik left the dining-room glad that the ordeal was over and not a little mystified at his old commander's behaviour.

And well he might be!

On the corvette Captain Luzgin had seemed a very prince among sailors, especially when he stood on the bridge giving orders in rough weather—yet here, at home, with his wife, he seemed a different man, "meek as a lamb." And another thing: on the corvette he was

always kind to his men, seldom inflicted punishments, and when he did, only with good cause—yet now he was threatening to have him "flayed" all on account of this "blonde piece" of his.

"It's that spoilt puss who wears the trousers here!" he thought to himself, with a touch of scornful sympathy for his former commander. "She's the one I've got to keep on the right side of," he reflected.

"You coming to live here, chum?" said Ivan as he passed through the kitchen.

"Yes, that's it," said Chizhik drily—he had no use at all for servants and orderlies and thought them lazy "scowbankers,"' not regular sailors at all.

"There's plenty of room for us both here. Would you like a cigarette?"

"No, thanks. I smoke a pipe. . . . See you later."

On his way to the naval depot, Chizhik thought about the "thin time" he was going to have as a servant, especially with a "Nagging Nell" like Mme Luzgina. The very idea of living in gentlefolks' houses was distasteful to him.

He regretted the accident that had deprived him of his two fingers. Had it not been for that, he could have remained a

regular sailor right up to the age of retirement.

"Mustn't touch vodka—of all the crazy ideas!" he said aloud, as he reached the gates of the naval depot.

V

At about eight o'clock next morning, Chizhik moved over to the Luzgins' with his belongings: a small chest, a mattress, a pillow in a pink cotton pillow-case (a present from his friend the boatswain's wife) and a balalaika. Depositing these in a corner of the kitchen, he took off his tight-fitting uniform, put on his sailor shirt and a pair of canvas shoes and presented himself to Mme Luzgina, ready to begin his new duties.

In his wide trousers and loose shirt, whose big wide collar set off his strong, sinewy neck, Fedos had quite a different air about him—the unconstrained and even quite prepossessing air of the dashing, experienced seaman who is equal to any circumstances. Everything sat well upon him and gave an impression of neatness. As for the mingled smell of tar and

makhorka that hung about him, Shura thought it the most delightful and exciting smell in the world.

Examining him from head to toe, Mme Luzgina came to the conclusion that the new servant wasn't quite so bad after all and not nearly as ugly and boorish as he had seemed at first. Nor did he look so very sullen.

The only thing that still bothered her was his grimy-looking hands; and staring at them disgustedly, she asked him:

"Did you go to the bath-house as I told you?"

"Yes, Ma'am, I did," said Chizhik. And as if in self-justification he added: "The tar won't come off all at once, Ma'am. No matter how hard you wash."

"Well, wash your hands more often. Keep them clean."

"Yes, Ma'am."

Then looking down at his canvas shoes, Mme Luzgina said sternly:

"And mind you don't come in here barefooted. You're not on a ship now!"

"No, Ma'am."

"Well, go and have your tea now. Here's a piece of sugar for you."

"Much obliged, Ma'am!" said Chizhik, carefully taking the sugar so as not to touch her white fingers.

"And don't stay too long in the kitchen. When you've drunk your tea come here to Alexander Vasilyevich."

"Hurry up and come back, Chizhik," Shura said.

"I'll be right back, 'Lexander Vasilyich!" said Fedos.

From the outset Fedos and Shura got along together like a house on fire.

First of all Shura took him to his nursery and showed him all his numerous toys. Some of them aroused the sailor's curiosity and he examined them with interest—much to Shura's delight. Two of the toys—a mill-wheel and a steamer—were broken, and Fedos promised to make them work again.

"Could you really?" Shura asked incredulously.

"I'll try to, anyway."

"Can you tell stories, Chizhik?"

"I can."

"Will you tell me some?"

"Why not? Now and again I will."

"I'll love you if you do, Chizhik."

The sailor stroked the boy's head with his rough hand, and his eyes, under their overhanging, bushy brows, smiled gently and tenderly.

The gesture was not only not displeasing to Shura, who had been told by his mother never to allow familiarities from servants, but disposed him still more to his new friend. And, lowering his voice a little, he went on:

"Do you know what, Chizhik?"

"What, Master Alex?"

"I'm never going to complain about you to Mummy;"

"But why should you? I wouldn't do you any harm. It's wrong to do harm to children. It's the most wicked sin there is. Not even a beast will do harm to cubs. If we two fall out by any chance, we'll settle it between ourselves, shan't we?" said Fedos, smiling good-naturedly. "We won't bring your mummy into it, eh? Twill be better so, Master Alex. Why should we tell tales about each other? Tale-telling's a nasty business, Master Alex. . . a nasty business!" Fedos continued, voicing the time-honoured traditions of lower deck law and custom.

Shura agreed that tale-telling was a "nasty business"—he had often been told

the same by Anton and Anyutka—and hastened to explain to Fedos how, to save him from a flogging, he'd never let on to his mother about Anton's calling him "the Devil's own spawn."

"But they used to flog him often just the same. He was rude to Mummy! And he used to get drunk!" added the boy in a confidential whisper.

"You did right, lad . . . quite right!" said Fedos in an almost tender voice, and he patted the boy's shoulder approvingly. "Your child's heart had the wisdom to take pity on him. And he was in the wrong, this Anton. What business had he to take it out on a child? A proper fool he must be! But you, young though you are, didn't let on about him . . . Well done, son!"

Shura was obviously flattered at this approval, though Chizhik's words ran counter to his mother's orders about not concealing anything from her.

Fedos sat down carefully on a trunk and continued:

"If you'd let on to your mummy about what Anton said, they'd have taken it out of his hide."

"What does that mean, Chizhik?"

"It's an expression we sailors use, meaning: getting a very bad flogging," said Chizhik, laughing.

"Did they ever take it out of your hide?"

"Well, yes, when I was young, they did. I went through it all."

"Did it hurt very, very much?"

"It wasn't pleasant, to be sure."

"What did they flog you for?"

"Oh, one thing and another. They're not very particular in the navy."

Shura was silent for a while. Then, evidently desirous of sharing a piece of interesting information with Chizhik, he said in a tone of mystery:

"I've been flogged too, Chizhik."

"You! Poor kid!"

"Mummy flogged me. . . . And that hurt, too."

"Why ever did she do that?"

"Once because I broke her cup, and the other time 'cause I was disobedient. But you mustn't tell anyone, Chizhik."

"Never fear, lad, I won't tell anyone."

"But Daddy's never flogged me."

"Good luck to him. Why should he?"

"But Petya Goldobin, now—you know Admiral Goldobin?—told me he gets it

pretty often, only his daddy always does the flogging."

Fedos shook his head disapprovingly. No wonder Admiral Goldobin was so unpopular with the sailors. A real brute if ever there was one!

"Does Daddy punish the sailors on the Kobchik?'

"You have to sometimes, Master Alex."

"And does he flog them?"

"Sometimes. But your daddy's a good man. His men love him."

"Of course he is. Daddy's a very good man. But couldn't we go out now, Chizhik?" said the boy, changing the conversation abruptly and gazing up at the window, through which long rays of sunlight were streaming into the room, suffusing it with brightness.

"Why, yes, let's go out. The sun's shining finely now. It warms your heart to see it so."

"But we'll have to ask Mummy first."

"To be sure. We must ask for leave."

"Do you think she'll let us?"

"I'm sure she will."

Shura ran out, and a minute later came back, shouting joyfully:

"Mummy says we can go out! But I'm to put on my winter coat and let her see me in it first. Dress me, Chizhik! My coat's hanging over there. You'll find the cap and scarf there too."

"What a lot of clothes to wear, Master Alex! Enough for a snow-storm, isn't it?" laughed Fedos, as he dressed the boy.

"That's what I said to Mummy: I shall be too hot."

"Yes, you will."

"But Mummy won't let me wear my other coat. I asked her. Come on, then . . . let's go to Mummy."

Mme Luzgina examined Shura's costume and, turning to Fedos, said:

"Take care of the young master. See he doesn't fall and hurt himself!"

"How can I? And what harm will it do the boy if he does?" Fedos thought, utterly disapproving of Mme Luzgina's idle "tongue-wagging." In a correct, respectful voice he answered:

"Yes, Ma'am. No, Ma'am."

"Go on out, then."

The two joyfully left the bedroom, followed by the envious eyes of Anyutka, who was holding the baby.

"Just wait for me in the corridor while I change my shoes, Master Alex, I won't be a moment."

Chizhik hurried into the room beyond the kitchen and put on a pair of boots. Then, donning his pea-jacket and sailor's cap, he went out with the boy into the big courtyard, at the bottom of which was a garden whose bare trees were just bursting into the first green buds of spring.

VI

It was lovely outdoors.

The spring sun shone radiantly down from the light blue sky, across which little fleecy white clouds were drifting, and it felt quite warm. There was an exhilarating keenness in the air, which smelt of vernal freshness mingled with manure and the sour odour of black bread and cabbage soup from the adjoining barracks. Water was dripping off the roofs of the houses and glittering in puddles and forming little winding streamlets which ran up and down the thawed, steaming earth, where the new grass was just beginning to emerge.

The whole courtyard seemed quivering with life.

Near the cart-shed, clucking contentedly, hens were straying, and a restless gay-plumaged cock was strutting about, seeking out grains of corn for his lady friends. Ducks were quacking among the puddles and every now and again a flight of sparrows swooped down into the courtyard from the garden and hopped about, chirruping and squabbling. Doves strutted along the roof of the cart-shed, straightening out their grey-blue feathers in the sunlight and cooing; and basking in the sun beside the water-butt, lay a big, red-haired mongrel, rousing itself from time to time to snap at a fly.

"Isn't it lovely, Chizhik?" shouted Shura exultantly, and like a young colt suddenly set free, he raced away to the cart-shed on the other side of the yard, frightening away the sparrows and the hens which scattered in every direction with frantic cackles that made the pompous cock stand on one foot in astonishment.

"Yes, it's fine!" said the sailor.

And seating himself on an upturned barrel outside the cart-shed, he drew out of his pocket his little pipe and tobacco

pouch, knocked the pipe out, packed the makhorka down with a crooked thumb, and set to smoking with obvious enjoyment, surveying the courtyard around him with its ducks and chickens and watchdog and young grass and streamlets with that affectionate gaze only those who love nature and animals are capable of.

"Take care, Master Alex! Don't fall into the puddles! There's a lot of water about. It suits the ducks all right!"

Shura soon grew tired of running about and came back and sat down beside Fedos who seemed to have a sort of fascination for him.

They spent nearly the whole day out of doors, only going in for meals; and in the course of the day Fedos revealed such a wealth of knowledge, such a wonderful capacity for explaining all about ducks and hens and the fleecy little clouds in the sky that Shura was filled with admiration and awe for his companion's store of knowledge. How could he know so many interesting things? he wondered.

A whole new world was revealed to him. Chizhik opened his eyes for the first time to all the fascinating things there were in the courtyard. And he listened spellbound as

Chizhik talked about animals or blades of grass or whatever it was—talked with such understanding and intimate knowledge as if he were one of them himself.

The subject cropped up through a prank of Shura's. He had thrown a stone at a duck and hit it, and the duck scuttled away, quacking frenziedly.

"You shouldn't have done that, 'Lexander Vasilyich!" Fedos said, shaking his head and frowning. "It was wrong of you," he repeated, mild reproach in his voice.

Shura reddened. He wasn't sure whether to take offence or not, so he pretended not to have heard, and started kicking earth into one of the streamlets with an air of studied unconcern.

"Why hurt a poor harmless bird like that? She's limping now, poor thing, and saying to herself, 'Why did that boy throw a stone at me?' And she's gone off to tell her husband, the drake, about it."

Shura felt rather uncomfortable: he understood that he'd done wrong; and at the same time it tickled his curiosity that Chizhik had spoken about the ducks as if they were able to think and speak.

But unwilling, like most proud children, to admit being in the wrong, he simply answered haughtily:

"Nonsense, Chizhik! As if ducks could think or talk to each other!"

"But what do you suppose? All God's creatures have minds and can think in their own fashion. They can talk to each other too. Look at that sparrow chattering there," said Chizhik, indicating a sparrow which had just flown out of the garden. "Do you suppose that little rogue just says: Chirp, chirp!' and that's all there is to it? Don't you believe it! What he's doing is this: he's found some food and is calling his mates to come along and share it. 'Come and have a peck, boys!' he's saying to them. Mind you, he's only a sparrow, yet he understands that food must be shared out. Til eat and you'll eat, we'll all eat together'—that's what he says."

Shura sat down on the barrel beside him, obviously impressed. And Chizhik went on:

"Take dogs now. . . . That Laika over there. Do you suppose he doesn't understand about Ivan's pouring boiling water over him this morning? The shameless idler! Ill-treating a poor helpless animal like that," said Chizhik angrily. "And

now, you'll see. Laika won't go near the kitchen again. He knows what to expect there. But he's not afraid of you and me, look!"

And so saying, he called up the dog—a shaggy, unprepossessing-looking animal with intelligent eyes—and stroked it, saying:

"What did that silly fool do to you, poor doggie? Let us see your back!"

The dog licked his hand and Chizhik carefully examined its scalded back.

"Well, Laika, it's not so bad, after all. Twas more from injured^ feelings that you yelped, I reckon. Never mind. We won't let him hurt you again."

The dog licked his hand again gratefully and wagged its tail.

"You see, dogs, too, understand kindness. And not only dogs. Even insects have feelings, only they can't speak. And even grass sort of squeaks when you tread on it." Warming to his subject, Chizhik went on in this strain for quite a while. Shura was fascinated; but the thought of the duck worried him, and he said to Chizhik in an anxious tone of voice:

"Oughtn't we to go and see if the duck's all right? I may have broken her leg."

"No, she's all right. There she is waddling about over there. You didn't need the doctor to cure you, did you, Mrs. Duck?" laughed Fedos; and seeing that the boy was ashamed of what he'd done, he stroked his head and said:

"She isn't angry with you any more, Master Alex. She's forgiven you. And tomorrow, if your mummy lets us come out again, we'll bring out some bread for her."

Shura was already quite captivated by Chizhik. And in after years, when put in the charge of real tutors, he was often to recall his early "nurse" and think that none of them could compare with him.

When eight o'clock came, Fedos put him to bed and started telling him a good-night story. But Shura was too tired to hear the story out and soon dozed off, after murmuring sleepily:

"I won't hurt the ducks any more. Good-night, Chizhik. I love you."

That evening Chizhik moved into his quarters in the room beyond the kitchen.

Having taken off all his clothes except his shirt and pants, he opened his box, the inside of whose lid was covered with brightly coloured prints and pomade-jar labels (oleographs and illustrated papers

did not exist in those days) and, before doing anything else, pulled out a little darkened ikon of Nicholas the Patron Saint of mariners, crossed himself and hung it up on the wall above his bed. Then he hung up his mirror and towel, laid his mattress on the wooden trestle bed and spread the sheets and cotton blanket.

This done, he surveyed his new quarters with a satisfied air, took off his shoes, and sat down on the bed to have a smoke.

Ivan was still busying himself in the kitchen, having just brought in the samovar. He looked into the room and said:

"Aren't you coming in to have some supper, Fedos Nikitich?"

"No, thanks, I don't want any."

"Nor does Anyutka. I'll have to eat by myself, then. But wouldn't you fancy a cup of tea? I'm never short of sugar, you know!" said Ivan with a sort of conspiratorial wink.

"No, thank you. Not now."

"Just as you like," said Ivan in an injured tone; and he went back to the kitchen.

He did not like this new room-mate of his —did not like him one bit. Ivan was not at all to Chizhik's taste either. Chizhik disliked servants and orderlies as such, but this

roguish, insolent cook was especially obnoxious to him. The one thing about him he found particularly unpleasant was his way of making ambiguous jokes to Anyutka when the three of them were eating together. Chizhik didn't say anything, but merely frowned. Ivan soon realized, however, that this angered the sailor, and he desisted and tried instead to impress him by his "fine manners" and by boasting about how much his master and mistress cherished and valued him.

Chizhik kept his peace, but inwardly he called Ivan "a good-for-nothing." As for what he'd done to Laika, he told him straight that it was a "downright shame" and added:

"How would you like to be scalded like that? And you call yourself a sailor!"

Ivan laughed it off, but secretly he nursed a grievance against him—doubly bitter because he had shamed him in front of Anyutka, who obviously agreed with what Fedos had said.

"But it's time to go to bed!" Chizhik said aloud, having finished his pipe.

He stood up, said the Lord's Prayer in a loud, solemn voice, crossed himself, and lay down to sleep. But it was long before he

could get to sleep: his mind thronged with thoughts about his fifteen years at sea and his present altered condition.

"The boy is a nice kid, but how am I going to get along with those other two—the 'blonde piece' and the 'scowbanker'?" he asked himself.

Finally he decided to let things take their own course—"let it be as God wills"—and fell asleep, contented.

VII

Fedos Chizhik, like most Russian sailors of that period, when serfdom had not quite outlived its day and the common people in the navy as everywhere else were harshly and even brutally treated, was a philosopher and a fatalist.

As his whole life's happiness was chiefly a matter of protecting his body against blows and gaskets, and his face from serious injury (the slight injuries were nothing to him), he mapped out a course of conduct based on a strict observance of duty and good behaviour, leaving all the rest to "God's will."

This rather touching faith—typical of the Russian peasant—in God's merciful goodness resolved all Chizhik's doubts and uncertainties about his present and future fate, and was practically the only thing that kept him from what he called "giving way to despair and tasting the convict labour gangs."

Thanks to this faith he was able to go on being a good sailor and a stoic, who relieved his feelings, when outraged at the sight of so much cruelty and injustice, by the simple medium of hearty cursing even at a time when the truly Christian patience of the Russian sailor was being sorely tried.

Since the time when he had been torn away from the plough to be packed off into the army through the whim of his old mistress, and, because of his small stature, had been drafted into the navy without ever having seen the sea before, his life had been a kaleidoscopic series of transitions from good luck to bad luck, from bad luck to that now almost unbelieveable state of misery which the sailors called "hell afloat," and from that to good luck again.

If "God willed" it that he had a captain, a chief officer, or officers of the watch who

were not quite so brutal in those days of universal brutality as the common run and did not flog a man unless they had reason —then Fedos, that excellent top-man, felt calm and happy, and, no longer under the constant threat of blows, his native geniality and humorous disposition asserted themselves and made him one of the most popular story-tellers in the forecastle.

But if "God willed" a captain or chief officer of what the sailors called the "mad-dog" type—the kind of man who, if there was even a few seconds' delay in hoisting or furling sails, would have all the topmen flogged for it—then Fedos would lose his cheerful spirits and become gloomy and depressed. And after getting flogged he would often go off on the loose when the ship reached shore. Yet even then he always contrived to find soothing words for the dispirited young sailors, saying to them —with a force of conviction remarkable in one whose own back was a bloody mass of weals and bruises:

"God willing, they'll transfer this mad dog of ours to some other ship, and then we'll get someone better. Cheer up, lads! It won't always be like this!"

And the sailors believed him—they so terribly wanted to believe him—that, "God willing," the "mad dog" would be transferred to some other ship and they would be rid of him. And somehow that made life more bearable for them.

Both aboard and ashore, Fedos Chizhik stood high in his shipmates' estimation as being the "right sort" of man who had his head "screwed on tight" into the bargain, and was a daring topman who'd given abundant proof both of his courage and of his knowledge of seacraft. They respected him and loved him for his fine, upright character and modesty. He was particularly liked and admired by the younger sailors who were not yet hardened to the life of the service; for Chizhik always constituted himself their protector and did all he could to defend them from the boatswains' and petty officers' bullying.

Incidentally, in the matter of "reforming" bullying boatswains, Chizhik seemed to make a slight departure from his usual fatalistic attitude; for he based his hopes of "reforming" them not only on God's will, but also—and indeed mainly—on the power of human action.

At any rate, when persuasion and an earnest appeal to "treat men decently" failed to have the desired effect on such a brute, Fedos would resort to warnings:

"Don't try to be the biggest toad in the puddle, bo'sun. Pride goes before a fall, the Bible says. Mind somebody doesn't teach you a lesson one of these days."

And if the warnings, too, fell on deaf ears, Chizhik would shake his head ruminatively and knit his brows, evidently making some secret decision.

Gentle and good-natured though he was, when it was a matter of preserving the traditions of the unwritten lower deck law, Chizhik would not hesitate to take stern measures. He would collect a few other sailors whom he could trust and they would hold a secret meeting and decide what was to be done about the boatswain's ill-doing. Usually at these unofficial trials it was decided to "teach the bo'sun a lesson"—which was duly done as soon as the crew went ashore. He would be beaten to within an inch of his life in some back street of Kjonstadt or Revel and carried back to the ship. No boatswain in those days would ever have thought of complaining to the officers about it, and he usually explained

his battered condition by saying that he'd been brawling with foreign merchant seamen. Usually, after such a lesson, a boatswain would use his fists more sparingly. He still blustered and swore as artistically as ever, of course, but nobody minded that.

When things turned out like this, Fedos often used to say, with his native amiability:

"See how we made a man of him. Quite a regular bo'sun now. . . ."

He had no wish to be promoted himself. It wouldn't have suited a character like his at all. And when once the chief officer wanted to make him a petty officer, he begged him most earnestly not to do so.

"Please, sir, don't do it, I beg you," he said.

The chief officer, astonished, asked him why.

"I'm not cut out for it, sir. It isn't my line at all, sir. Please, sir, just let me remain a rating," he said, without, however, giving any real reason for his refusal.

"Please yourself . . . I meant it as a reward."

"Thank you, sir! I'm very grateful to you, sir, for letting me remain a rating."

"All right, more fool you," said the chief officer.

And Fedos left the chief officer's cabin immensely relieved at having evaded a post which would have obliged him to "yelp" at his fellow-ratings and rub shoulders with the gentlemen officers.

"Keep away from them and their kind—the further the better," was his attitude.

Chizhik had been through the mill in the course of his long service. He had been beaten and praised, flogged and honoured in turn. His last three years aboard the Kobchik under Captain Luzgin had been the happiest for him. For Luzgin and the chief officer were kind men by the standards of that period, and the crew of the Kobchik had a comparatively easy time. There were no daily floggings, no living in perpetual fear. Neither was there any of that harsh senseless drilling that made men's life hell in the navy.

Luzgin knew Chizhik to be a splendid topman and, later, having chosen him to be strokesman of his gig, he got to know him still better and thought highly of his sturdy, upright character.

And Fedos thought that, "God willing," he would remain with Captain Luzgin for

another three years, at the end of which time he would be given shore duties till the expiration of his twenty-five years' service, when he would be able to return to his little home village in the remote Simbirsk Province.

With this village of his, by the by, he had never lost touch. Regularly once a year he got one of his shipmates who could read and write to compose a letter from him to his "Dearest Parents," a letter that usually consisted entirely of good wishes and regards to his kinsfolk and friends.

But one of the Kobchik's crew caused a complete transformation in his mode of life by accidentally letting go a halyard while Chizhik was still on the top, with the result that two of his fingers were crushed.

The sailor was severely flogged and Chizhik rushed off to Kronstadt naval hospital, where the fingers were amputated. Chizhik bore the operation without a groan, merely clenching his teeth, while great drops of sweat rolled down his pain-blanched cheeks. A month later he was back at naval depot again.

He had hoped that, God willing, they would now discharge him from the navy as "unfit." At least that was what the clerk at

the depot had encouraged him to hope, suggesting that he get someone to "put in a word for him." Others had got out that way!

But he did not know anyone who could intercede for him, and he did not want to risk bothering his commanding officer: you could never know what that might lead to!

So it came about that he remained in the navy and became a nurse.

VIII

A month had passed since Fedos went to the Luzgins.

Needless to say, Shura thought the world of his new nurse. Shura fell completely under his spell, and listened with avid' attention to his yarns about gales and hurricanes Fedos had experienced at sea; about sailors and ship life; about the Negroes, the black people of the islands beyond the Indian Ocean, who went about practically naked; about dense forests and exotic fruit-trees; about monkeys and crocodiles and sharks; about the wonderful starlit sky and the burning tropical sun. He was determined to be a sailor himself when he grew up; and in the meantime he did all he could to model himself on Chizhik, who had become his ideal.

With a child's egoism he would never let him out of his sight but wanted him beside himself at every hour of the day; and since Chizhik came, his mother played a secondary role, as it were, in his life. It was not surprising. She could not tell stories like Chizhik did—let alone make all sorts of wonderful toys—boats and tops and kites. .

. . What is more, Shura never felt as though he had a pernickety nurse with him; he and Chizhik were more like friends together. They seemed to have the same interests and often spontaneously expressed the same thoughts.

The closeness of their relationship rather disturbed Mme Luzgina; and the boy's diminished interest in herself, which she had noticed, of course, made her rather jealous even. Moreover, with her refined, pensionnat breeding and fastidious ladylike manners, she was afraid that Shura was getting slightly coarsened by his contacts with the sailor.

At the same time she could not but admit that Chizhik did his duties conscientiously, and that Shura was much the better for his care, and wasn't moping and fretting as he had been before; and she could always feel it quite safe to leave the boy in his charge if she wanted to go out any time.

His merits notwithstanding, Chizhik remained an object of distaste to Mme Luzgina. She tolerated him for Shura's sake, and when she had to speak to him, she did so with the cold hauteur and

almost frank contempt of a lady of society speaking to a lout of a peasant.

The chief thing that angered her about Fedos was the total absence in him of that obsequiousness that she liked to see in servants, and which" was so marked a characteristic of her favourite Ivan.

Chizhik's attitude was just the reverse of this. Always rather morose, not to say sullen, when he was in her presence, answering her questions with the laconic automatism of the subordinate, keeping silent when she rebuked him (Chizhik thought the "blonde piece" just wagged her tongue for nothing), he was very far from satisfying Mme Luzgina's requirements. And she had the feeling that, secretly, Chizhik didn't acknowledge her authority at all and that he wasn't a bit grateful for all the benefits which transference from the barracks to her home had (so it seemed to her) conferred on him. And this angered her.

Chizhik was aware of the "blonde piece's" attitude towards him. He, for his part, had no special sympathy for her either—mainly on account of the way she bullied poor little Anyutka the maid; nagging her over every trifle; shouting at

her; and, not infrequently, smacking her face—not in anger but just out of malice, cold-bloodedly—with a cruel smile on her face.

"The spiteful vixen!" he said to himself on more than one occasion, frowning grimly as he saw Mme Luzgina, slowly and deliberately, her large grey vicious eyes fixed on Anyutka's terrified face, smack her thin pale cheeks with her own plump, white, bejewelled hand.

And he felt sorry—perhaps more than sorry—for this pretty browbeaten young girl with a frightened look in her blue eyes. And sometimes when Mme Luzgina wasn't present he would say to her kindly:

"Cheer up, dear! God willing, this won't last much longer. They say they're going to give us our freedom soon. Stick it just a little longer—and then you'll be free to leave this place and go wherever you like. God has wisened the Tsar!"

Chizhik's sympathetic words comforted Anyutka and her heart filled with gratitude towards him. She knew he was sorry for her and she knew, too, that it was only thanks to his presence that odious Ivan was not plaguing her with his attentions as insolently as he had done before.

Ivan, on the other hand, hated Chizhik with all the force his mean little soul was capable of. In addition, he was jealous of him, for he partly attributed to his coming Anyutka's complete indifference to his own person, which he considered not unattractive.

This hatred increased when one day, coming into the kitchen, Fedos found Anyutka struggling in the cook's embrace.

As soon as he saw Fedos, he let go of her and, putting on a careless air, said:

"She doesn't understand a joke, the fool."

Fedos looked black as a thundercloud.

Without saying a word he went straight up to Ivan and holding his huge, hairy fist to the other's white, startled face, said, barely able to control himself:

"Do you see that?"

Ivan shut his eyes in terror at the proximity of that enormous fist.

"If ever you touch this girl again, I'll pound your rotten face into a jelly, you dirty swine!"

"I . . . I . . . I wasn't doing anything. It was only a joke."

"I'll give you 'jokes'! How dare you insult the girl, you shameless cur?"

And turning to the moved and grateful Anyutka, he said:

"If he ever annoys you again, Anyutka, let me know. I'll knock his ruddy block off if he does. And I mean it!"

And he left the kitchen.

That evening Anyutka whispered to him:

"Now he'll tell tales about you more than ever. He's been doing it already. I heard him telling Madam the other day that you made the whole kitchen stink of makhorka."

"Let him tell what tales he likes!" said Fedos contemptuously. ''Can't I even smoke my pipe when I want to?" he added.

"Madam can't bear the smell of cheap tobacco."

"What if she can't? I don't smoke in her rooms, do I? I only smoke here, in our servants' quarters. A sailor can't live without his pipe."

After this, Ivan's sole desire was to get rid of his detested room-mate, no matter what the cost; and knowing that Mme Luzgina did not like Fedos herself, he missed no opportunity to whisper in her ear about him.

He was much too familiar with the young Master, he would give her to understand,

"not like a servant at all." And he wasn't a bit grateful to Madam for all her kindness to him. He and Anyutka were always whispering together. It was disgraceful.

All this conveyed by hints and innuendos —accompanied, of course, by fervent protestations of his own loyalty.

The young woman drank in all he told her and became increasingly stern and exacting towards Fedos. She kept a careful eye on him and Anyutka and often went into the nursery unexpectedly, as if by accident, and asked Shura what Chizhik had been talking to him about. But she was never able to discover any definite evidence of his guilt—a thing which annoyed her all the more, as did the fact that Chizhik himself appeared not to notice that she was angry with him and made no change in his previous attitude of official respectfulness.

"God willing, the 'blonde piece' will calm down," he thought to himself, alarm creeping into his heart at the sight of her angry, hostile look.

But the 'blonde piece' did not cease to find fault with Chizhik, and before long the storm broke over his head.

IX

One Saturday evening when Fedos came back from the bathhouse to put him to bed, Shura—who always shared his impressions with him and told him all the domestic news—greeted his nurse with the words:

"Do you know what I'll tell you, Chizhik?"

"No, Master, let's hear it," said Fedos, smiling.

"We're going to Petersburg tomorrow. To Granny's. Do you know Granny?"

"No, master, I can't say I do."

"Well, she's as kind as you are, Chizhik. She's Daddy's mother. We're going by the morning steamer!"

"Well, that's splendid. You'll see your kind granny and you'll have a ride on a steamer too. Twill be almost like going to sea."

When they were alone together, Fedos always treated Shura as an intimate friend. The boy liked him to do so, and it was quite in keeping with the warmth of their friendship. But when Mme Luzgina was present, he was careful not to speak with such familiarity, and Shura, too, realized that it was necessary to hide their friendly relationship from her.

"She'd make a fuss about it," Fedos reflected. "Fancy a sailor calling a gentleman's son Thou'! She's a snob, she is!"

"Wake me early tomorrow, Chizhik. And put out my new coat and my new shoes."

"Don't worry. I'll have everything ready for you. And I'll give your new shoes an extra-special polish. I'll turn you out in full trim. You'll be as smart as they make 'em!" said Chizhik cheerfully and affectionately as he undressed the boy. "Well, say your prayers now, 'Lexander Vasilyich."

Shura said his prayers and then dived into bed.

"I shan't wake you very much earlier," Chizhik said. "Not till half past seven. You must get your full sleep. Tis bad for you else."

"Baby is coming with us and so is Anyutka, but Mummy is leaving you behind, Chizhik. I asked her to let you come too, but she wouldn't."

"Why should she take me? Just an extra expense."

"It would be much more fun if you were coming, Chizhik."

"Oh, you'll have a good enough time without me. One day away from me won't

do you any harm. Besides, I'll ask for a day off myself. Don't you think I want a holiday too?"

"Yes, of course, Chizhik. Mummy's sure to let you go."

"I think she ought to. I haven't been out all the month."

"Where shall you go, Chizhik?"

"Where shall I go? Well, first I'll go to church, and then I'll go and see some friends of mine, a bo'sun and his wife. He's an old friend of mine. We've sailed round the world together. I'll sit there with them, have a bit of a chat, and then I'll go down to the docks, maybe, and look up some of my mates there. That's what my holiday will be. Now go to sleep, lad. God bless you."

"Good-night, Chizhik! I'll bring you some cake from Granny's. She always gives me something nice."

"Better eat it yourself, Master Alex! Or if you like, give it to Anyutka. She'd be glad."

"I'll give her some and bring you some too," murmured Shura sleepily.

He was always bringing his nurse sweets and often brought him lumps of sugar, too. But the latter Fedos always declined,

telling the boy not to "touch the larder" as it might lead to trouble.

Deeply moved by the boy's words, he said to him, his gruff voice filled with tenderness:

"Thank you for your kindness, sonny. Thank you. Your little heart is in the right place . . . and wise for its baby years. God grant you grow up a good man, the right sort—and never wrong your fellow-men. God will love you for it. What, asleep already?"

There was no answer. Shura was already fast asleep.

The old sailor made the sign of the cross over him and tiptoed out of the room. He felt as happy and light-hearted as the child himself, to whom old Chizhik—who'd known little enough affection in his own hard life—had become deeply and sincerely devoted.

X

Next morning Mme Luzgina, pink, fresh and perfumed, in an elegant blue silk dress, her gold hair a mass of elaborate curls, her plump white hands in bracelets and rings, sat hurriedly drinking her coffee

for fear of missing the steamer, when Fedos came into the room and asked her:

"Will Madam give me leave to go out today?"

The young woman raised her eyes and asked impatiently:

"What do you want to go out for?"

Chizhik for the moment was at a loss. What could one say to such a "foolish" question?

"To visit some friends, Ma'am," he said at last.

"What friends?"

"Some of our sailors, Ma'am."

"Very well," said Mme Luzgina, after deliberating for a time. "But remember what I told you. Don't you come back from these friends of yours drunk!" she added sternly.

"Why should I, Ma'am? I'll come back perfectly myself, Ma'am."

"I don't want to hear any of your silly explanations! Be back by seven," Mme Luzgina snapped at him.

"Yes, Ma'am," replied Fedos with due respectfulness.

Shura stared at his mother in surprise.

He couldn't understand why she got so angry with Chizhik—even seemed to dislike

his hero, in fact; whereas she never said a harsh word to that horrid Ivan. Shura didn't like Ivan at all—for all the latter's cunning attempts to ingratiate himself.

When the others had left and he had said good-bye to little Shura, Fedos went to his chest in the bedroom and took out a small piece of cloth in which he kept his "capital"—a few rubles he'd earned by making shoes. (He was something of an expert at this craft and could make quite modish shoes, which sometimes brought him orders from clerks and mates and storemen.)

Having examined his "capital," he pulled out a greasy ruble note and placed it in his trouser pocket. With this ruble he would buy two ounces of tea, a pound of sugar and a small supply of tobacco.

He wrapped the rest of the money up again and locked it up in the chest. Then he adjusted the wick of the ikon-lamp over the bed and got ready to go out. He combed his coal-black moustache and side whiskers, put on a new pair of boots and his grey naval coat with brightly polished buttons and, wearing his cap slightly a-tilt, left the house cheerful and pleased.

"Aren't you coming back for lunch?" Ivan called after him.

"No!"

"What a dolt! A lout of a sailor!" Ivan thought as he watched him go.

Himself arrayed in a smart grey jacket, white shirt and gaudy tie, a brass watch-chain dangling on his waistcoat, he pursed his thick lips scornfully as he watched Chrzhik pass by the window. His little eyes suddenly gleamed and he tossed his mop of ginger hair which was thickly greased with butter.

XI

First of all Fedos went to St. Andrew's Cathedral, arriving just as the service was about to begin.

Buying a candle, he walked up the aisle and placed it before the image of Saint Nicholas, and then went back to the rear of the church where a crowd of poor people were standing. He stood there, grave and rapt, throughout the service, trying to concentrate his mind on holy things and crossing himself vigorously and fervently. The reading from the Gospel moved him,

though he barely understood the .Slavonic text. He was equally moved by the choir's beautiful singing. And altogether he was in the elevated state of mind of one far removed from all life's troubles and vexations.

Listening to the choir and to the soft tenor voice of the priest speaking of love and compassion, he felt wafted away, as it were, to a quite different world. And it seemed to him that there—in that other world—life would be wonderful for him and all other sailors—happier by far than it had been on this sinful earth.

When the service was over, he left the church with a warm, exalted feeling in his heart. Beggars were congregated in the porch and on the stairs and he gave a few kopeks to about ten of them, picking out mostly men and old people.

Still wrapped up in what he called "godly" thoughts about the Lord being all-seeing, and thinking that if He allowed injustice in this world, it was only to try men and prepare the patient and the long-suffering for the life of felicity that would reward them hereafter (a life in which, of course, there was no place for the "mad dogs" of captains and officers), Chizhik

walked briskly to a little wooden house in a distant side street where his friends the retired boatswain Flegont Nilich and his wife Avdotya Petrovna, who kept a stall on the market-place, rented a room.

Short and thin, but still strong and vigorous-looking for his sixty old years, old Nilich was sitting at the table, which was covered with a coloured table-cloth. Dressed in a clean cotton shirt and bell-bottomed trousers, with shoes on his bare feet, he was pouring vodka into a glass with a bony, slightly shaky hand, taking the utmost care not to spill any.

And on his wrinkled old face, tinged with the flush of age, with its hooked nose, clean-shaven (it was a Sunday) cheeks, with a big wart on one of them, and little, but still lively eyes, was a look of such concentrated, reverent attention that he didn't even notice Fedos come in.

And Fedos, as if understanding the importance of this sacred function, did not reveal his presence till the glass was filled to the brim and Nilich sipped it up with evident relish.

"Flegont Nilich! Good day to you!"

"Why, if it isn't Fedos Nikitich!" said Nilich (as his friends all called him) joyfully.

"Come and sit down, old chap. Avdotya Petrovna will soon bring the shchi in."

And refilling the vodka glass, he handed it to Fedos.

"I've had a sip already, old chap."

"Your health, Nilich!" said Fedos, and drank the vodka slowly with a grunt of satisfaction.

"Where have you been hiding all these days?" asked Nilich. "I was thinking of going to the depot to inquire. I thought you'd forgotten us. An old friend like you. . . ."

"They've made me a servant, Nilich."

"A servant? Who to?"

"Captain Luzgin. Do you know him?"

"I've heard of him. A decent man, they say. Have another?"

And he poured out some more vodka.

"Your health, Nilich!"

"And yours, Fedos," answered Nilich, tossing down the vodka in his turn.

"He's all right to live with, but his wife, I tell you—"

"A nagger, eh?"

"A ruddy vixen—spiteful as hell! And gives herself such airs, too! Just because she's blonde and blooming she thinks there's no one like her!"

"What work do you have to do?"

"I'm nurse to the captain's boy. He's a nice kid, a jolly little beggar. If it wasn't for his nag of a mother, life would be easy enough there. But she's the one who rules the roost in that house."

"What about the captain?"

"She has him in leading strings. He doesn't dare to let out a squeak. A sensible man, too, mind you. But he's all under her thumb."

"That's how it often is, old chap," Nilich said slowly.

Nilich, who in days gone by had been a dashing bo'sun and "a sensible man" was himself completely under the sway of his wife—though he always made a swaggering show of being master in his own house before strangers.

"Let a woman get the upper hand with you, and she is the very devil. Women haven't got real sense, you know, like men; they're all fiddle-faddle," Nilich continued lowering his voice, however, and glancing nervously at the kitchen door. "You've got to be strict with women, to teach them who's master. But whatever is my old woman dawdling at? I must go and bustle her up."

But just at this moment the door opened and in stepped Avdotya Petrovna, a tall, stout, strong woman of about 50, with a remarkably energetic expression on her still comely face.

Her sleeves were rolled up and in her red hands she held a pot of soup, wrapped in a dish-cloth. And she herself looked boiling hot, too. Nilich seemed almost a pygmy beside her, and any suggestion of his "bustling" her seemed quite absurd.

"I was just saying to myself: whoever can that be that Nilich is jabbering to. And it's you, Fedos Nikitich. Good day to you, Fedos Nikitich. We thought you'd forgotten us," said the boatswain's wife in a deep, husky voice.

And placing the pot on the table, she shook hands with their old friend and said to her husband:

"Have you offered our guest a drink?"

"To be sure. You didn't expect us to wait for you, did you?"

Avdotya Petrovna glanced at her husband as if surprised at his audacity, and poured out the steaming, savoury soup. Then she got two more glasses out of a small cupboard and filled all three with vodka.

"That's right! My Petrovna sure is a sensible woman," said Nilich, an ingratiating note creeping into his voice; and he. threw a tender glance at the vodka bottle.

"Have another, Fedos Nikitich," said the boatswain's wife,

Chizhik did not refuse.

"Your health, Avdotya Petrovna! Your health, Nilich!"

"Your health, Fedos Nikitich!"

"Your health, Fedos!"

They all drank with solemn faces. Then they crossed themselves and began their meal, eating the soup in silence. Now and again only, Avdotya Petrovna's deep voice exclaimed:

"Have another, Fedos Nikitich!"

By the time they'd finished their soup, the vodka bottle was empty.

Then Avdotya Petrovna went into the kitchen and came back, with some roast meat and another bottle.

Nilich, evidently quite overcome at such generosity on his wife's part, exclaimed:

"Yes, Fedos, Petrovna is a pearl among women!"

By the end of the meal conversation became quite lively. Nilich mixed up his

words and became rather fuddled. Chizhik and Avdotya Petrovna, both of them red in the face, were a little tipsy, too, though they both retained their dignity.

Fedos told them all about the "blonde piece" and the way she bullied Anyutka; and about Ivan, the scoundrelly cook; and went on to philosophize that God saw everything and that Mme Luzgina would certainly go to hell if she didn't bethink herself and mend her ways.

"What do you think, Avdotya Petrovna?" he asked.

"Hell is the only place for her, the hussy!" said the boatswain's wife vehemently. "A laundress friend of mine has told me too what a foul-tempered bitch she is. . . ."

"To be sure, they'll give her a proper pasting when she gets to hell! A proper pasting! Lay on as hard as they can, they will. As hard as they give it to us in the navy!" said Nilich—who imagined hell as a place where they flogged you as brutally as men were flogged on Russian warships. "And as for that cook-fellow, bash his ruddy face in! That'll teach him not to tell tales!"

"I will, if need be. A dirty cur—that's what he is! People like that don't

understand kindness," said Chizhik, thinking of the incident with Anyutka.

Petrovna began complaining about business. The stalk keepers these days were downright dishonest, she said, the younger women especially. They tried to steal your customers from under your very nose.

"And you know what men are! For a soldier or a sailor these young women are like maggots to a carp. They'll buy two kopeks' worth and try to get a ruble's worth of pinch out of the woman, the shameless fellows. And some of the hussies like it. They give them the glad eye."

And, as if suddenly remembering something particularly outrageous, Petrovna assumed a bellicose attitude and placing one brawny hand on her hip, exclaimed:

"I've been putting up with this till now, but one of these days I'm going to scratch that black-haired Glashka's eyes out for her! Do you know the one I mean?" she asked Chizhik. "Herman's one of your sailors. Topman Kovshikov."

"Yes, I know who you mean. Why do you want to scratch her eyes out, Avdotya Petrovna?"

"Because she's a bad lot—that's why! She steals my customers and doesn't play the game. Yesterday evening there was, an artilleryman came to my stall. An old man he was, too—you'd think he ought to know better. He has one foot in the grave, the old cuss. Well, he came up to my stall, so he was my customer, by rights, and any decent stall-keeper would have left him to me instead of bawling out to him and trying to grab him. But this Glashka, the slut, sticks out her breasts at him so's to catch his eye and calls out to him: 'Come to me, tine gentleman! Come to me, brave soldier! My wares are cheaper!' And she grins her toothy mug at him. And what do you think? The mangy old hound was flattered that a young woman called him a 'brave soldier' and went and bought at her stall instead. I didn't half tell them off for it, both of them. But what's the good of words with a slut like that!"

Both the men (Nilich especially) knew that, when roused, Avdotya could swear as lustily as any boatswain and get the better of anyone by the sheer power of her tongue. Not for nothing everyone in the market—buyers and sellers alike—went in

terror of it. But from delicacy they kept silent.

"Yes, I'll scratch her eyes out if she does such a thing again," Petrovna repeated.

"She wouldn't dare do it again. Not with a clever woman like you!" said Nilich.

And although he was already "half-seas-over" and could barely speak, he began, with diplomatic cunning, to enumerate his wife's many virtues: she was wonderfully clever; she was a splendid housewife; she cooked like an angel . . . altogether there was no woman in all Kronstadt to equal her. After this he threw out a delicate hint that a glass of beer—just one little glass—would be extraordinarily welcome just now.

"What do you think, Petrovna?" he asked his wife in a wheedling voice.

"Look at the old buzzard! So that's what you were getting at! You're sozzled as it is. That's why you were flattering me, you old fox!"

But Petrovna spoke light-heartedly and evidently herself thought that beer would be a good idea; for soon afterwards she put on her shawl and went out. A few minutes later she came back—and several bottles of beer adorned the table.

"And she's so nimble and quick, my Petrovna is. . . . Lord, what a woman!" Nilich repeated with maudlin emotion after two glasses of beer.

"There, he's screwed tight already!" said Petrovna scornfully.

"Who, me? An old bo'sun like me screwed tight? Why, I could drink two bottles straight off, if you gave them to me. . . . And now, dear wife, pour out another glass."

"You've had enough."

"Petrovna! Respect your husband's wishes!"

"Enough!" said Petrovna curtly. Nilich put on an injured expression.

It was four o'clock when Fedos, having taken leave of his friends and thanked them for their hospitality, stepped out into the street again. His head was swimming but he walked firmly, stopping to salute passing officers with ostentatious parade-ground smartness. He felt in the best of humour and at the same time terribly sorry for everyone: sorry for Anyutka; sorry for a small child he met in the street; sorry for a cat that ran past him; and sorry for the officers themselves—these men who went

about mindless of their impending doom, forgetting God the All-Seeing.

After buying what he needed, he went down to Petrovsky wharf and talked to some sailors he knew, oarsmen of officers' leave-sloops, and heard from them that the Kobchik was now at Revel. Then at seven o'clock he returned to the Luzgins.

Laika welcomed him with joyful barking.

"Good evening, Laika! How goes it, doggie?" he said to the dog, patting him affectionately. "Had anything to eat? I daresay they've forgotten to feed you. Well, wait a moment and I'll get you something. There's sure to be something in the kitchen."

Ivan was sitting by the kitchen window, playing an accordion. Seeing that Fedos had been drinking, he laughed in a gratified manner and said:

"Had a good time?"

"No too bad."

And feeling sorry that Ivan had had to be all on his own all day, Fedos added:

"Why don't you go out now, while the mistress hasn't come back? I'll mind the house."

"It's too late now. It's gone seven. The mistress will be back any minute now."

"As you please. Have you any bones for the dog?"

"Up on the shelf there."

Chizhik took the bones and gave them to Laika and then came back to the kitchen, and sitting down, said unexpectedly:

"I say, old chap, why don't you try to live decently? Really. Why don't you give up these conceited ways of yours? We've all got to die one day, and in the next world they won't stand for such ways, you know."

"What ways do you mean?"

"All sorts. Annoying Anyutka, for instance. You can't win a girl by force. And you can see she doesn't want you. Run after some other girl instead. It's a shame to treat a young girl like that. She's treated bad enough as it is." Chizhik continued in a quite friendly tone. "And we ought to get along peacefully together, and needn't always be quarrelling. I'm not saying these things in anger, not I."

"Maybe you've taken a fancy to Anyutka yourself? Is that why you're so keen to take her part?" said Ivan mockingly.

"Don't be silly! I'm old enough to be her father."

Chizhik did not pursue the conversation in this direction, however, and seemed a little embarrassed.

And Ivan, in his wheedling tenor voice, went on:

"I want nothing better than to live peacefully with you, Fedos Nikitich. But you look down on me so."

"Then give up these ways of yours. Bear in mind that you're a sailor—and then no one will ever look down on you. You mustn't lose all sense of decency just because you've been working as a servant. Telling tales to your mistress! You ought to know better! It's a shame!"

Just then the bell rang at the front door. Ivan ran to open it. Fedos, too, went out to meet Shura.

Maria Ivanovna gave Fedos a searching look and said:

"You're drunk!"

Shura was about to run up to him, but she pulled him back sharply by the arm.

"Don't go near him. He's drunk!"

"I'm not, Ma'am. I'm not drunk at all. What makes you think I am? I can do all my duties properly. I'll put the young master to bed and tell him a story same as always. I did have a drop, it's true. At bo'sun Nilich's,

it was. But 'twas only in moderation, Ma'am. Truly it was."

"Get out!" shouted Mme Luzgina. "I'll have a word with you tomorrow."

"Mummy . . . Mummy. . . . Let Chizhik put me to bed!"

"I'll put you to bed myself. I can't let a drunkard do it."

Shura burst into tears.

"Stop crying, you bad boy!" shouted his mother. "And you, drunkard, why are you still standing there? Go back to your room this instant and go to bed."

"Ah, Madam, Madam," said Chizhik, with a look in his face in which sorrow and reproach were mingled, and he returned to the kitchen.

Shura continued to sob loudly. Ivan smiled triumphantly.

XII

Next morning, rising as usual at six o'clock, Fedos was in the gloomiest of moods. Mme Luzgina's promise to "have a word" with him about the previous night's occurrence boded no good for him, he felt. He had long been aware that she hated the

sight of him and tried to find fault with him on any and every occasion, and he could but guess with a sinking heart what that "word" of hers meant. The more he thought about it, the gloomier he became, realizing as he did how helpless he was and how completely dependent on this "blonde piece," who ' had somehow or other become his "boss" and held his fate in her hands.

"The trouble is that she hates me, and she's not one to understand a man's character," he said to himself. He derived but small consolation now from the thought that she would certainly end up in hell, and mentally cursed Captain Luzgin for having given too much rein to his "she-devil" of a wife. Instead of keeping her properly in hand, he had—

Greatly perturbed, Fedos went out and sat down on the porch steps, waiting for the samovar he had lit to boil and smoking pipeful after pipeful of tobacco.

Life was already astir in the yard. A cock crowed frenziedly every now and then, chanting its welcome to the joyous spring morning, and in the green-decked garden sparrows were twittering and a robbin was singing. Swallows swooped here and there,

vanishing momentarily to their nests only to reappear a few seconds later to continue their hunt for booty.

But this morning Fedos did not survey the scene with the joyous feelings it usually inspired in him. And when Laika woke up and stretched, as dogs do, and then came trotting towards him, wagging a merry tail, the old sailor stroked him and said to him (as if in answer to some thought that had just been occupying him):

"Our life's like yours, old chap—we can't choose our masters either."

Returning to the kitchen, Fedos threw a contemptuous glance at Ivan who had just got up, and not wanting him to see how worried he really was, put on a stern, impassive expression. He had noticed how delighted Ivan had looked the previous evening when Mme Luzgina had scolded him; and ignoring him completely, he sat down at the kitchen table and started drinking his tea.

Into the kitchen came Anyutka, still sleepy and dishevelled, her white cheeks slightly flushed, carrying in her arms Mme Luzgina's clothes and boots. She greeted Fedos in an especially friendly voice after the incident of the previous night, while

completely ignoring Ivan's courteous "Good morning."

Chizhik offered her some tea and a piece of sugar. She drank two cups quickly and then thanked him and rose to go.

"Have some more. There's plenty of sugar," said Fedos.

"Thank you kindly, Fedos Nikitich, but I must hurry and clean Madam's clothes now. The baby may wake up."

"Let me do it for you, while you have your tea," Ivan suggested.

"I don't need your help!" Anyutka snapped, and went out again.

"Isn't she touchy!" Ivan said. Reddening with vexation he cast a furtive glance at Chizhik, and thought with glee:

"You're in for it today, sailor!"

Punctually at eight o'clock Chizhik went to wake Shura. The boy was already up and, remembering the scene of the night before, was himself uneasy and sad; and he greeted Fedos with the words:

"Don't be afraid, Chizhik! Nothing will happen to you!"

He hoped to comfort both his friend and himself by these words, but in his heart he was by no means so certain that "nothing would happen."

"Afraid or not, 'twill be as God wills it," said Fedos, stifling a sigh. "It all depends on which side your mummy gets out of bed this morning!"

"How do you mean?"

"It's a saying we have: what sort of mood she's in, it means. But your mummy was wrong to think I was drunk last night. Drunkards don't act like that. If a man can do his duties properly, how can anyone say he's drunk?"

Shura fully agreed and said:

"That's what I told Mummy: you weren't drunk at all, Chizhik. When Anton got drunk, he wobbled when he walked, but you didn't wobble at all!"

"That's just it. You knew I was sober, though you're only a child. I know the right measure, old chap. And your daddy wouldn't have minded at all if he'd seen me last night. He'd have seen that I'd only been drinking in moderation. He understands it's only natural for a sailor to have a good time on his day off. No one's any the worse for it. Yet your mummy gets angry. Why? What have I done to her?"

"I'll ask Mummy not to be angry with you, Chizhik. Really, I will!"

"Thanks, Master Alex. I'm sure you will. You've a good heart. But run along and get your breakfast now while I tidy your room," he added when the boy was dressed.

But before going Shura thrust an apple and a sugarplum into his nurse's hand saying:

"These are for you, Chizhik! And I've brought some for Anyutka, too!"

"Thank you, son. But 'twill be best I keep them for you to eat yourself some time."

"No, no. They're for you. The apple's a nice, sweet one. And I'm going to ask Mummy not to be angry with you, Chizhik. I am!"

And so saying, the boy went off to breakfast, looking anxious and worried.

"Only a child—yet he knows what his mummy is like!" Fedos muttered to himself, and he set about tidying the room with a sort of frenzied zeal.

XIII

Not five minutes had passed when Anyutka came bursting into the nursery, struggling with her tears. "Fedos Nikitich! Madam wants you." "Why are you crying?"

"She hit me! And she's threatened to whip me!" "The beast! Why?"

"I suppose that sneak Ivan's been telling her tales again. She was in the kitchen just now, and when she came out she was just mad."

"A mean person will always listen to what's mean."

"But, Fedos Nikitich—do ask her to forgive you for last night. Otherwise she'll —"

"What have I done to be forgiven for?" said Fedos moodily, and he went into the dining-room.

Evidently Mme Luzgina had got out of bed on the wrong-side that morning, for she was sitting at the table positively glowering. And when Chizhik came in and stood respectfully at attention before her, she gave him such a furious, icy look that the poor man felt gloomier than ever.

Little Shura was in an agony of suspense, as if expecting something terrible to happen. Tears stood in his eyes and he gazed at his mother imploringly.

Tense silence reigned for several seconds.

Mme Luzgina must have been expecting Chizhik to beg her forgiveness for having been drunk and having answered her back.

But the old sailor seemed to have no feeling of guilt at all; and this "stubbornness" on the part of the "lout of a peasant," who evidently didn't recognize her authority over him, made the young woman, accustomed to complete servility from her entourage, still more angry.

"You remember what I said last night?" she said, finally, in a quiet, crisp voice.

"Yes, Ma'am, I do. I wasn't drunk, you see, so why shouldn't I?"

"Not drunk?" said Mme Luzgina with a sneer. "I suppose you think a man's only drunk when he can't stand on his legs?"

Fedos said nothing. What answer could he give to such a ridiculous question?

"What did I tell you when you first came here? Did I, or did I not, tell you that you mustn't drink? Don't stand there like a block of wood! Answer me!"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"And didn't Vasily Mikhailovich tell you you must always do as I say and must never answer me back?" she continued her interrogation in the same cool level voice.

"Yes, Ma'am."

"And this is how you obey orders, is it? I'll teach you to speak to your mistress! I'll teach you not to play the hypocrite and carry on amours behind my back! I know all about it," she added, glancing at Anyutka.

This was more than Fedos could stand.

"That's not true, Ma'am. As before God Himself I, swear to you there's been nothing of the kind here. If you believe everything that scoundrel of a cook tells you, that's your business, Ma'am. He'll have still bigger lies to tell you, no doubt!"

"Silence! How dare you speak to me like that! Anyutka! Bring me a pen and ink and some writing-paper!"

"Mummy!" cried Shura in a tremulous, imploring voice.

"Get out of my way!" shouted his mother.

"Mummy!. . . Mummy, darling! Please, please . . . if you love me . . . don't send Chizhik to the depot."

And sobbing, trembling all over, Shura ran up to his mother and began kissing her hand.

Fedos felt a lump in his throat, and the sombre expression on his face was lightened by a warm feeling of gratitude to the child.

"Get out! This is no business of yours!" she cried, pushing the boy aside. Stupefied, still scarcely able to believe she could be in earnest, Shura returned to the other end of the room, crying bitterly.

Meanwhile, Mme Luzgina, in a rapid, nervous hand, wrote out a letter to the adjutant of the naval depot—a letter in which she asked him to "do her a small favour" and have her orderly flogged for drunkenness and insolence. And at the end of the letter she added that she would be going to the concert at Oranienbaum the following day and hoped that he would be kind enough to accompany her.

Then, placing the letter in an envelope, she handed it to Chizhik, saying:

"Go to the naval depot at once and give this to the adjutant."

"Yes, Ma'am," said Fedos in a faltering voice, knitting his bushy brows and trying to conceal his agitation.

'Shura rushed up to his mother.

"Mummy! You won't do that!. . . Chizhik! Wait a minute! Don't go . . . He's so good, Mummy . . . so wonderful. . .. Mummy, darling .. . Please . . . please don't do it!"

"Go!" Mme Luzgina shouted to Chizhik. "I know how you've put my foolish Boy up to

this. You thought you'd make me soft through him, didn't you?"

"It's not I have put him up to it; it's God! You will remember Him some time, Ma'am," said Fedos, stern solemnity in his voice, and glancing affectionately at Shura, he opened the door and went out.

"You're horrid! You're wicked! I don't love you any more!" shouted Shura all of a sudden, carried away by rage and indignation at the spectacle of such injustice. "And I'm never going to love you again!" he added, his tear-filled eyes flashing,

"So that's how you behave now! So that's what this ruffian's been teaching you! How dare you speak to your mother like that?"

"Chizhik's not a ruffian—he's a good man! But you're not good—you're wicked!" went on Shura with the wild courage of despair.

"I'll teach you, too, how to speak to your mother, you brat! Anyutka! Tell Ivan to bring me the birch!"

"Go on, "flog me . . . you're nasty . . . wicked woman. . .. Flog me!" Shura screamed wildly.

And at the same time his little face went deathly pale, and he trembled all over and gazed, terrified, at the door.

The boy's heart-rending screams while he was flogged were audible to Fedos as he left the courtyard and walked down the street, carrying in the cuff of his coat sleeve Mme Luzgina's note, about the nature of whose contents he was in no doubt whatever.

And such compassion and love for the little boy did he feel at this moment that he quite forgot that he was himself on his way to a flogging just when his term of service was nearly over. He felt more fond than ever of this child who had incurred suffering and punishment for his sake.

"What a beast! She hasn't any pity for her own child even," he. thought indignantly as he quickened his pace so as to get out of earshot of the boy's cries which were now plaintive and pleading, now like the howl of a helpless hunted little animal.

XIV

The young midshipman in charge at the depot office was surprised when he read Mme Luzgina's note. He had served in the same company as Chizhik and knew him to be one of the best sailors they had and not at all given to drunkenness or insolence.

"What's this, Chizhik? Have you been getting drunk?"

"No, sir."

"But Maria Ivanovna writes—"

"Yes, sir."

"What happened, then? Explain."

"Yesterday she gave me leave to go out and I had a few drinks, sir, but I came back in the evening quite myself, quite in my senses, that's to say."

"Well?"

"But Mme Luzgina thought I was drunk. Being a woman, she naturally doesn't know what drunkenness is."

"And what's this about your being insolent? Were you rude to her?"

"No, sir. I wasn't rude either. I only said she'd been listening to her cook's dirty tales."

And Chizhik faithfully recounted what had happened.

The midshipman pondered it for several minutes. He knew Maria Ivanovna—at one

time he had even been rather "stuck on her"—and he knew that she was extremely strict and despotic with her servants, and that Captain Luzgin was quite frequently sending them down to be flogged (obviously at her insistence, for Captain Luzgin, a gentle, kind-hearted man himself, was notoriously henpecked by his attractive wife).

"But all the same, Chizhik, I've got to do as Maria Ivanovna asks," said the young officer at last, shifting his eyes uneasily from Chizhik's.

"Yes, sir."

"You understand, Chizhik, I've got to believe what she says."

He stressed the word "got." "And Vasily Mikhailovich told me to treat his wife's orders about punishing servants as his own."

Chizhik understood only one thing—he was going to be flogged on the "blonde piece's" orders—and he said nothing.

"I can't do anything about it, really," said the midshipman apologetically as it were.

He was well aware that it was both unjust and contrary to regulations to punish a sailor on the orders of a lady, and that duty and conscience demanded that

he should refuse to do so if he had any courage at all. But he was weak, and like all weak men he eased his conscience by reasoning that if he let him off now, Chizhik would only be punished still more harshly when Captain Luzgin returned from .Revel. Moreover, it would mean quarrelling with the Luzgins and might even lead to trouble with the depot commander. The latter was a friend of the Luzgins, too, and was, he believed, secretly enamoured of Mme Luzgina whose buxom figure held great attraction for the old man, himself as thin as a match-stick. Besides, the old man, not being particularly humane by nature, believed that a flogging never did any harm to a sailor anyway.

And so the young officer told the duty orderly to make the necessary preparations for the punishment in the armoury.

The flogging-bench was set up in the middle of the big hall. Two petty officers stood one on either side of it, both wearing a strained, unhappy look on their faces and each holding a bundle of fresh green birch branches. Other branches lay on the floor at the side in case new rods were required. The young midshipman, who had not been

in the navy very long and was not yet quite "hardened," stood some way off, looking rather upset.

Conscious of the injustice of the punishment he was to receive, with a sort of gloomy submissiveness, and torn by a sense of shame and of injured dignity, Chizhik undressed unusually quickly, as if not wanting to keep the two petty officers (both well known to him) and the young midshipman waiting.

Then, clad in nothing but his shirt, he crossed himself and lay face downwards on the bench, placing his head on his crossed arms and closing his eyes.

It was a long time since he had last been flogged and the few seconds while he was waiting for the first blow were indescribably bitter as he thought of his helplessness and the humiliation of his position. All the sorrows of his hard life rose up before him. . . .

Meanwhile the midshipman called one of the petty officers aside and whispered to him, "Lightly!"

The petty officer's face brightened, and he in his turn whispered the message to his companion. "Begin!" ordered the young midshipman, turning away. After a dozen

strokes—which caused Chizhik practically no pain, since the green branches, though vigorously flourished, were so aimed as barely to touch his skin, the midshipman shouted:

"That's enough. Report to me when you're dressed, Chizhik."

And so saying he event back to the office.

Chizhik, looking as gloomy as before and burdened with the shame of his punishment (for all the comedy of its execution), dressed himself hastily and said:

"Thank you for not beating me, brothers. I got off with just the shame of it."

"It was the adjutant's orders," said one of the petty officers. "But why did they send you here, Fedos Nikitich?"

"Because a foolish vixen of a woman is my 'boss' now."

"Who's that?"

"Captain Luzgin's wife."

"She's a holy terror, that woman," said one of the petty officers. "She's always sending men here to be flogged. How are you going to stick it there now, I wonder?"

"It's as God wills. A man must live. There's nothing to be done about it. And

the Captain's boy, that I'm nurse to, he is a nice little kid. I'd be sorry to leave him. He got a flogging himself on my account. Tried to stick up for me before his mother, he did."

"You don't say! He's not like his mother then!"

"Not a bit. He's as good as gold, the boy is."

Chizhik returned to the office and went into the room where the midshipman was sitting. The midshipman handed him a letter and said:

"Give this to Mme Luzgina. It says that you've been severely punished."

"I'm much obliged to you, sir, for your kindness to an old sailor," Chizhik said feelingly.

"Well, am I not human? I wouldn't have punished you at all if I had my way. I know what a good sailor you are," said the midshipman, who still looked embarrassed. "Well, go back to your mistress now. God grant you get on better in future. And mind you don't go telling anyone how we let you off."

"You need have no fear of that, sir! My humble thanks, sir!"

Shura sat huddled up in a corner of the nursery, looking like a little frightened animal. Every now and again he uttered a sob. At the memory of the indignity wrought upon him a lump came into his throat, he trembled all over, and a dumb anger welled up in his heart. At these moments he hated his mother, but hated still more Ivan—Ivan who had brought the birch-rods in, cheerful and smiling, and who had held his squirming body so tightly while he was being flogged. Had it not been for that beast he could have run away.

And into his head crept thoughts of how he'd revenge himself on Ivan. Definitely he would revenge himself. And he would tell Daddy when he came back about how unjust Mummy had been to Chizhik. Daddy should hear everything.

From time to time he came out of his corner and peeped out of the window to see if Chizhik was returning. "Poor Chizhik!" he thought. "He must have been flogged hard, too. And he doesn't know that I've also been flogged because of him. I'll tell him . .. I'll tell him all about it!"

These thoughts about Chizhik consoled him a little, and he waited impatiently for his friend's return.

Mme Luzgina, upset herself, paced up and down her large bedroom, burning with hatred for the servant who had been the cause of her son's speaking to her as he had done. The man was positively a bad influence on the boy and she would have to get rid of him. As soon as Vasily came back, she'd get him to engage another man instead. In the meanwhile she'd just have to put up with this coarse, insolent fellow. And at any rate, she thought, he wouldn't dare get drunk or be insolent again after this flogging. The man had to be taught a lesson!

Once or twice she quietly looked into the nursery and then came back again, hoping vainly that Shura would come and ask her forgiveness. She vented her irritation on Anyutka, scolding her and accusing her of "carrying on" with Chizhik.

"Don't try to deny it, you hussy. Tell me the truth!"

Anyutka stoutly protested her innocence.

"If you want to know, Ma'am, it was the cook who was always annoying me. I

couldn't go into the kitchen without his starting his dirty tricks. But Chizhik never would have thought of such a thing, Madam."

"Why didn't you tell me about the cook before?" Mme Luzgina asked suspiciously.

"I didn't dare to, Madam. And I thought he'd stop it.. . ."

"Well, I'll get to the bottom of all this yet. You'd better look out! And now go and see what Alexander is doing."

Anyutka went into the nursery and found Shura at the window nodding his head at the returning Chizhik.

"Master Alex! Your mummy's sent me to ask what you're doing. What shall I tell her?"

"Tell her I've gone for a walk in the garden, Anyutka."

And so saying he ran out to meet Chizhik.

XVI

Running up to meet him at the entrance to the yard, Shura looked at his friend compassionately and clasping his big

rough, horny hand, said affectionately, struggling with his tears:

"Chizhik!. . . My good, darling Chizhik!"

Fedos's brooding face was transfigured by a look of ineffable tenderness.

"What an affectionate little fellow you are!" he mumbled, touched.

And glancing swiftly at the window to make sure that the "blonde piece" was not looking, he quickly caught the boy up in his arms, pressed him to his chest and—taking care not to rasp his face with his bristly moustache—gently kissed him. Then he put him down again with the same quick movement and said:

"Now go back to the house, 'Lexander Vasilyich. There's a good boy."

"Why can't we go in together?"

"We mustn't do that. If your mother sees that you've come to meet me, she'll get angry again."

"Let her see! Let her get angry!"

"What's this? Saying things against your mummy? You mustn't do that, 'Lexander Vasilyich. That will never do! You must always honour your mother. Run along now. We'll have time for a talk later on."

Shura, who fully recognized Chizhik's authority and always did as he told him,

prepared to follow his advice. But before going, anxious to console his friend as quickly as possible for the misfortune that had befallen him, he said with some pride:

"I've been flogged, too, Chizhik!"

"I know you have. I could hear you crying, poor fellow. Twas for my sake you were punished. God will reward you. But run along now, my dear, or we'll both be in for it again."

Shura ran back to the house even more devoted to Chizhik than before. The unjust punishment they had both received bound them still closer together.

Having waited outside for a couple of minutes, Fedos walked into the kitchen firmly and resolutely, trying to hide the shame he felt at having been flogged under a mask of stern contempt.

Ivan watched him with a mocking glint in his eyes, but Chizhik didn't deign to notice his presence even, and strode through the kitchen to his corner of the bedroom just as if there were no one else there.

"Madam said you were to report to her as soon as you came back," Ivan shouted from the kitchen.

Chizhik did not reply.

Leisurely he took off his coat and changed into his canvas shoes. Then he took the apple and the sugarplum of Shura's out of his chest and put them into his pocket, and taking the midshipman's letter out of the cuff of his overcoat, went into the dining-room.

Mme Luzgina was not in the dining-room. The only person there was Anyutka, who was walking up and down the room with the baby in her arms, crooning some song to it in her pleasant voice.

Seeing Fedos, she looked up at him, an expression of grief and commiseration in her frightened face.

"Are you looking for Madam, Fedos Nikitich?" she asked in a whisper.

"Tell her I've come back from the depot," said Chizhik awkwardly, lowering his eyes.

Anyutka went towards the bedroom, but just at that moment the door opened and Mme Luzgina came in.

Fedos silently handed her the midshipman's letter and stepped back towards the door.

Mme Luzgina read through the letter. Gratified, evidently, that her request had been complied with and her "insolent" servant flogged, she said:

"I hope this punishment will be a lesson to you not to be insolent again."

Chizhik was gloomily silent.

And Mme Luzgina continued—in a gentler tone:

"In future behave properly—as a good servant should. Don't drink vodka, never be disrespectful to your mistress. . . . Then I shan't have to punish you again."

Chizhik did not say a word.

"Do you understand?" said Mme Luzgina, raising her voice, irritated by the sailor's silence and his sullen air.

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Why don't you speak, then? You must answer when you're spoken to."

"Yes, Ma'am," Chizhik answered automatically. "Well, go and find the young master now. You may go into the garden."

Chizhik went away and the young woman returned to her bedroom, furious at the coarse fellow's "callousness," as she called it. Most decidedly her husband was no judge of character! He had praised this man to the skies, and it turned out that he drank and was insolent and had no sense of remorse.

"What a boorish lot these sailors are!" she said to herself.

After lunch she got ready to go out. But before going she told Anyutka to fetch the young master.

Anyutka ran down to the garden.

At the bottom of the thickly overgrown garden, Chizhik and Shura were sitting on the grass in the shade of an overhanging lime-tree. Chizhik was making a kite and speaking quietly about something or other and the boy was listening attentively.

"Your mummy wants you, Master Alex," said Anyutka, running up, quite red in the face.

"What for?" asked Shura impatiently—he was so happy where he was, listening to Chizhik telling him all sorts of terribly interesting things.

"I don't know, Master Alex. Your mummy is going out. I expect she wants to say good-bye to you."

Shura reluctantly got up.

"Is she angry still?" he asked Anyutka.

"No, Master Alex. She's calmed down."

"Hurry along if your mummy wants you. And mind you don't say anything against her, 'Lexander Vasilyich. No matter what comes between them, a son must always honour his mother," Chizhik said kindly, leaving the kite and lighting his pipe.

Shura went into the bedroom timidly, an injured look on his face, and stood rather shamefacedly a few paces from his. mother.

Wearing a white hat and a smart silk dress, beautiful, blooming and scented, Mme Luzgina went up to her son, patted his cheek and said, smiling:

"Well, Shura, enough of sulking. Let's make it up, shall we? Ask your mother's pardon for calling her names. Kiss my hand."

Shura kissed his mother's plump, white, beringed hand and tears came into his eyes.

He really had been in the wrong. Calling his mother "nasty" and "wicked"—and hadn't Chizhik told him that it was a sin to be a bad son?

And magnifying the gravity of his offence under the wave of emotion that suddenly swept over him, he said in a voice of deep earnestness:

"I'm sorry, Mummy! Please forgive me!"

The sincerity in his voice and the sight of tears glittering in his eyes moved his mother's heart and she herself felt guilty for having punished her first-born so severely. She thought of his anguished,

terrified little face and his piercing screams as he was being flogged, and all her maternal instincts were aroused in the young woman. She felt like hugging and kissing him there and then.

But she was in a hurry to be off and afraid of crushing her smart new frock. So she confined herself to bending down and kissing him lightly on the forehead, saying:

"We'll forget all about it, shall we? And you won't say nasty things to your mummy again?"

"No, Mummy."

"And you'll love your mummy like you did before?"

"Yes, Mummy."

"And I love you, my little boy. Well, good-bye for now. Go back to the garden."

And patting his cheek again and smiling at him, she left the room with a rustle of her silk frock.

Shura returned to the garden vaguely dissatisfied. To the boy's impressionable mind, his mother's words and caress seemed somehow inadequate, falling short of that sense of overwhelming remorse which he experienced himself. And what worried him still more was the consciousness that on his own side the

reconciliation had not been complete. Although he had told his mother that he loved her just as much as ever, he still felt a kind of hostility towards her in his heart, not so much on his own account as on Chizhik's.

XVII

"Well, how's it going, lad? Made it up with your mummy?" asked Fedos, as Shura walked quietly back.

"Yes, Chizhik. And I asked Mummy to forgive me for calling her names."

"Did you call her names?"

"Yes. I said she was nasty and wicked."

"Well, you are a little spitfire! Fancy speaking to your mother like that!"

"It was for you I did it," Shura hastened to justify himself.

"I understand. But the real reason was your little heart couldn't bear to see injustice done . . . that's why you stood up for me. And that's why you were sorry for Anton, too. God will forgive you that, even though you have been rude to your mother. Still, you did right to apologize. After all, she's your mother. And when a

man feels he's in the wrong, it's always best to own up. He only feels the happier for it, no matter what comes of it. Isn't that true, 'Lexander Vasilyich? Don't you feel better now?"

"Yes, Chizhik," said the boy hesitatingly.

Fedos gave him a searching look and asked him:

"Why are you so quiet then? What is the matter, 'Lexander Vasilyich? Tell me about it, and let's talk it over. When you make it up with someone, your heart should feel light, because all the evil has gone from it . . . but you are still looking like a rain cloud! Did your mummy scold you again?"

"No, Chizhik. She didn't scold me at all."

"Then what is it? Come, sit down and tell me all about it, while I finish making our kite. A grand kite it's going to be. And tomorrow, if we get a bit of a breeze, we'll fly it."

Shura sat down on the grass and said nothing for a while.

"You say the evil goes, but it hasn't gone out of me\" he said suddenly.

"How so?"

"I mean: I'm still cross with Mummy and I don't love her as much as I did before. It's

bad, Chizhik, isn't it? I don't want to be cross with her, but I just can't help it."

"But why should you be cross if you've made it up?"

"Because of you, Chizhik."

"Because of me?"

"Why did Mummy send you to the depot for nothing? And why does she say you're bad when you're not?"

The old sailor was touched by the boy's devotion and the obstinacy of his indignation. Not only had Shura suffered through him, but he wouldn't be appeased.

"It's the spirit of God in him!" he thought to himself; and for the moment he did not know what to say to set the boy's mind at rest.

His love for the boy soon prompted an answer.

His sensitive, devoted heart understood better than the most experienced pedagogues would have done that the child must be guarded from all early resentment against his mother and that that very same "blonde piece" who had been making his own life such a misery had to be defended at all costs in her son's eyes.

And he said:

"But you must stop being angry! Think it over, lad, and then your anger will melt away. People have different ideas about things, you know. You and I think your mummy did wrong to punish me, but your mummy may think she did right. We think I wasn't drunk or insolent, but she may think I was drunk and was insolent, and deserved a flogging for it."

This idea opened a new horizon for Shura, so to speak; but before 'the meaning of Chizhik's words had had time to sink in, he asked, with sympathetic curiosity, in the most serious tone:

"Did they beat you very hard, Chizhik—take it out of your hide? And did you cry?"

"No, they didn't beat me at all hard, leave alone take it out of my hide," Chizhik answered, laughing. "Really? But you told me sailors got terrible beatings." "So they do. But this time they didn't beat me at all practically. They gave me a few light strokes just for the shame of it and because your mother had ordered it, but I scarcely felt them. I had the midshipman to thank for that. He was sorry for me and told them to beat lightly. But don't tell your mother, mind. Let her think I was properly flogged!"

"Bravo, midshipman! How clever of him! But I got a horrible beating, Chizhik."

Chizhik stroked the boy's head and said: "I know, I heard you, and was ever so sorry. But what's the use of speaking of it now. What's past is past."

They were silent for a while. Fedos was going to suggest playing a game of durak *[Durak ("Fool"), an amusing card game.—Tr.]* but Shura, still rather preoccupied, asked:

"So you think, Chizhik, that Mummy doesn't know that she was in the wrong?"

"Maybe she doesn't. Or maybe she does know, but doesn't want to show it before a common man. There are people who are proud like that. They know they're in the wrong, but won't say so."

"I see. So Mummy doesn't know that you're a good man, and that's why she doesn't like you?"

"It's her way of judging people, that's all —but you shouldn't be angry with your mummy for it. Besides, being a woman, she

has a different kind of mind to us men. She can't' size a person up straightaway. God willing, she'll come to understand me better later on and see the sort of man I am really. She'll see then that I'm looking after her son properly and taking good care

of him and telling him stories and not teaching him to do anything he oughtn't to do and that we get along all right together. Her mother's heart will come to realize that, 'Lexander Vasilyich. And loving her own child, she'll come to treat his nurse better too. Everything takes time, old chap. God makes people wiser in time. So stop bearing a grudge against your mummy, my dear," he concluded.

Thanks to Chizhik's words, his mother was exculpated to some extent in Shura's eyes; and joyful and relieved, as if in gratitude to him for resolving his doubts in this way, he kissed him impulsively and said confidently:

"Mummy will get to like you for certain, Chizhik! She'll get to know you! I am sure she will!"

Fedos, who was far from sharing the boy's optimism in this respect, gave him an affectionate look. And Shura continued excitedly:

"And then everything will be splendid, Chizhik. Mummy will never send you to the depot again. And she'll send that nasty Ivan away. He's always telling tales about you to Mummy, you know. I hate him. And he held me tightly while Mummy was

whipping me. When Daddy comes back I'm going to tell him all about Ivan. I'll be right to do that, won't I, Chizhik?"

"Better not. Better not tell tales 'Lexander Vasilyich. Keep out of it. No good ever came of it," Fedos said with a look of distaste and a gesture of utter contempt. "Truth will always win out, Master Alex. And you shouldn't complain about a servant—not if you can help it, that is. Some children who are just silly, or naughty, make complaints about servants for no good reason, and their parents have them flogged without going into it. It's no joke, I can tell you! Let's take Ivan even. . . . He's a pretty mean sneak, going round telling tales about his fellow-servants, but if you were to look into it, maybe it's not altogether his fault that he's so mean. If he was punched one on the jaw when he started telling tales, and then another one on his ugly nose till the claret was tapped," said Fedos, warming with indignation, "I daresay he'd drop the game. And then, Ivan's always been a servant, and has lost any decency he ever had. You know what servants are—it's all sham with them, no real man's work. It's all flattery, and soap, and lip service—lying and pretending, and

stuffing their bellies, thinking of nothing but how to get the tastiest left-overs from their master's table. If Ivan had been a real sailor, then maybe he wouldn't do these dirty tricks of his. His shipmates would have brought him into line all right! They'd have broken him in. And Ivan would have become quite a different Ivan. But I'm wagging my old tongue too much and boring you, 'Lexander Vasilyich. Let's have a game of Durak or Beggar-My-Neighbour."

He drew from his pocket a pack of cards and the apple and the sugarplum that the boy had given him, and handed them to him saying:

"Here's something nice for you."

"But they're for you, Chizhik!"

"Go on, eat them! I haven't got a sweet tooth like you! Go on!"

"Well, thank you, Chizhik. But you must have half!"

"Give me just a tiny bit—that's all. Well, you deal, 'Lexander Vasilyich. And mind you treat your nurse better than you did last time we played. You made me 'Fool' every time. You're a cunning one at cards, you are."

They made themselves comfortable in the grass in the shade of the lime-tree and began their game.

Soon the garden rang with the gay jubilant laughter of the boy and the grumpy voice of the purposely losing old man.

"Why, you've made me 'Fool' again. I'm no match for you, 'Lexander Vasilyich!"

XVIII

It was the end of August. The weather was cold, rainy and cheerless. The sun never once emerged from the leaden barrier of clouds that covered the whole sky. The wind made free in Kronstadt's muddy streets and alleys, humming the melancholy song of autumn, and every now and then the roar of the sea could be heard. A big squadron of old ships-of-the-line and frigates had just returned from a long cruise in the Baltic under the command of a then famous admiral, who was a great drinker and was wont to say, when dining at home: "Those who want to be drunk, sit by me; those who want to be

stuffed, sit by my brother!" (His brother, also an admiral, was a noted gourmand.)

The ships were drawn up in harbour where they were being unrigged in preparation for being laid up for the winter.

The Kronstadt roadsteads were deserted, but the town itself, so quiet in summer, was now much more lively.

The Kobchik had not yet returned from her summer cruise but she was expected any day now.

In the Luzgins' flat silence reigned—that heavy, oppressive silence that falls upon houses where someone is very ill. People walked about on tiptoe and spoke in unnaturally low voices.

Shura was ill—seriously ill. He had double pneumonia, a complication after the measles. For a whole fortnight now he had been lying on his back, thin and haggard, with big, sad eyes, glittering with fever, quiet and helpless as a winged little bird. The doctor visited him twice a day and each time he came his good-natured face looked more and more grave and he bunched his lips comically, as though thereby expressing the seriousness of his patient's condition.

Throughout this fortnight Chizhik had been constantly at the boy's bedside. Shura kept asking for him and was pleased if Chizhik gave him his medicine, and smiled sometimes when he told him his merry yarns. At night Chizhik sat in an armchair by his side, keeping watch just like at sea. He never went to sleep but carefully watched every movement of the feverish sleeping boy. During the day-time he went into the town to fetch Shura's medicine, and somehow always found time among his other duties to make some toy which would amuse his darling. He went about it all quietly and unobtrusively, without any fuss, and with amazing quickness, his face shining with a serene, calm cheerfulness that had a soothing effect on the patient.

It was then that the thing Shura had spoken of in the garden came true. Mme Luzgina, who was distracted with grief and despair and had herself grown weak and thin from sleeplessness and anxiety, began to see "that coarse peasant" of a sailor as he really was, and could not help marvelling at his kind, gentle nature as he kept watch, night after night, over her son,

and could not but be grateful to him for what he was doing.

That night the wind was howling in the chimneys louder than ever. The sea was running high, and Mme Luzgina, weighed down by sorrow, was sitting in her bedroom. Every gust of wind made her shudder as she thought now of her husband, sailing back from Revel in this terrible gale, now of her sick child.

The doctor had just left, looking graver than ever. "We must wait for the crisis," he had said. "With God's help, the boy will pull through. Go on giving him the musk and champagne to drink. Your servant is an excellent nurse. Tell him to sit up with the boy in the night and give him the medicine as I have prescribed. But you yourself must rest. I'll be round again in the morning."

Tears came into her eyes at the thought of the doctor's words. She crossed herself, and whispered prayers, her heart torn between hope and despair.

Still weeping she went into the nursery and walked over to Shura's bed. Fedos got up.

"Sit down, sit down, please," whispered Mme Luzgina, and looked at Shura.

He lay unconscious, breathing fitfully. She placed her Hand on his forehead—it was hot with fever.

"O God!" moaned the young woman, and the tears gushed from her eyes again.

Silence reigned in the dimly lit nursery. The only sounds were Shura's heavy breathing and the dismal howling of the wind outside.

"You ought to go and get some sleep, Ma'am," said Fedos almost in a whisper. "Have no fear, Ma'am—I'll look after the young master all right."

"You haven't slept for several nights yourself."

"We sailors are used to it. And I'm not at all sleepy. Do go and rest, Ma'am," he urged her gently.

And watching her anguished face compassionately, he added:

"And if I may be allowed to say so, Ma'am—don't lose heart! The young master will recover!"

"You really think he will?"

"Of course he will! Why should a boy like him die? He hasn't started living yet."

He spoke so confidently that he revived the young woman's hopes.

She sat down for a few minutes and then got up again.

"What a terrible gale," she murmured, as the wind howled through the street again. "I wonder how the Kobchik is weathering it. Won't they be in danger? What do you think?"

"The Kobchik'?, weathered uglier gales than this, Ma'am. They'll have reefed the sails and she'll just be bobbing up and down like a barrel. Don't worry, Ma'am. Vasily Mikhailovich is a splendid captain, thank God."

"All right, I will go and rest. Wake me up at once if anything."

"Yes, Ma'am. Good night, Ma'am!"

"Thank you, Chizhik, thank you for everything," said Mme Luzgina feelingly. And she went back to her room much easier in her mind.

But Chizhik kept vigil all night, and when next morning Shura woke up, smiled and said he felt better and wanted some tea, he crossed himself fervently, kissed the boy, and turned his face away to hide the tears of joy that rose to his eyes.

* * *

Next day Captain Luzgin returned.

Hearing from his wife and the doctor that Shura owed his life chiefly to Chizhik's care and was now out of danger, Luzgin in an excess of joy thanked him warmly and offered him a hundred rubles.

"They'll come in useful when you're discharged," he told him.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I can't take the money," Chizhik said in a slightly hurt tone.

"Why not?"

"Because it wasn't for money I looked after your son, sir. It was because I loved him."

"I know, Chizhik, but all the same . . . why not accept it?"

"Please, sir, you're offending me. I can't take the money."

"My dear fellow, I wouldn't offend you for anything in the world! Have it your own way then. I had the best of intentions," said Captain Luzgin, somewhat disconcerted.

He glanced at Chizhik and unexpectedly added:

"What a capital fellow you are, Chizhik!"

XIX

Chizhik spent three more years happily with the Luzgins till Shura was old enough to go to the Naval College and enjoyed universal esteem in the family. With the new cook who took Ivan's place he became excellent friends.

And altogether those three years went very well for him. The joyful news of the emancipation of the peasants was being hailed all over Russia. There was a new spirit in the air, which affected even Mme Luzgina, who, after hearing the young midshipmen's enthusiastic speeches, treated Anyutka more kindly for fear of being labelled a conservative.

Every Sunday Fedos got permission to go out, and after the church service paid a visit to his friend the boatswain and his wife, philosophized with them, and returned home in the evening not a little "fuddled" but (as he expressed it) "quite in his senses."

And Mme Luzgina didn't get angry when she heard him say to Shura as he brought him (as he always did) some little fairing:

"You mustn't think I'm drunk, 'Lexander Vasilyich. You mustn't think that. I can do everything right and proper!"

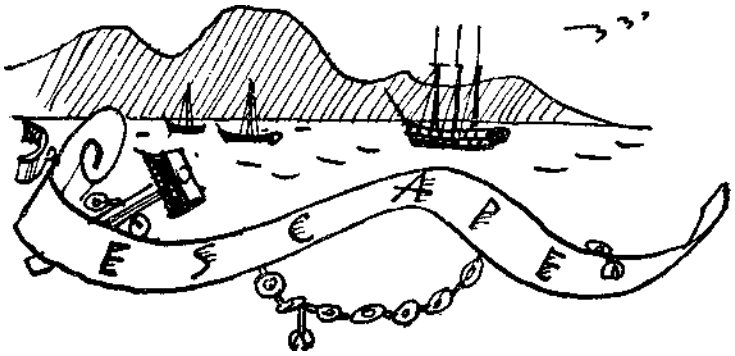
And as if to prove this, he would get out Shura's boots and clothes and give them an extra special cleaning.

When Shura joined the Naval College, Chizhik received his discharge from the navy. He visited his native village, but soon came back again and obtained a post as a watchman at the Admiralty in St. Petersburg. He never failed once a week to visit Shura at the college, and every Sunday he visited Anyutka who, after receiving her freedom, had got married and was in domestic service in St. Petersburg.

When he became an officer, Shura, at Chizhik's earnest request, took him to be his orderly. They sailed round the world together and Chizhik continued to act as his servant and his most devoted friend. Later, when his young master got married, Fedos nursed his children, and lived in his house till he died at the age of seventy.

The memory of Fedos Chizhik is a sacred one in Alexander Luzgin's family; and he himself was often wont to say, recalling him with great affection, that Chizhik was the finest tutor he ever had.

ESCAPE



I

THE sun swiftly climbed the cloudless turquoise heights, promising a hot day. Everything around was drenched in its brilliant light—the becalmed mirror-like surfaces of Sevastopol's blue inlets, the battleships, frigates, brigs, schooners and tenders of the Black Sea Fleet lying in the roads, and the beautiful city of Sevastopol itself, rising above the sea in an amphitheatre of gleaming forts, churches,

buildings, and the little suburban houses in their green setting of gardens and boulevards. It was nearly six o'clock of a lovely August morning. Work on the ships was already in full swing. By 8 a.m., when the flag was hoisted, they would all assume their customary smart air of spotless cleanliness and order, which has at all times distinguished the ships of the Black Sea Fleet.

Thousands of hands had been scouring and swabbing the decks, polishing the guns and the brass-work and cleaning everything else above and below deck since early in the morning.

Work had long since started in the harbour, the naval dockyards and the various workshops ashore. Amid the knocking of hammers and the twang of saws one caught snatches of the stirring "Dubinushka," to the tune of which Russian people find the lifting of heavy weights and the handling of huge logs an easier task somehow.

The dismal block-ships, chain-moored far inshore well away from the other ships, like so many lepers, were deserted. These were floating prisons. Their inmates, convicts of

military labour gangs, had been told off for their various jobs since four o'clock.

Dressed in thick canvas shirts and trousers, with ugly grey caps on their shaved heads, they passed in groups down the deserted streets with a clank of shackles, escorted by military guards, not to return until the evening, when the whole town poured out on to the boulevards and Grafskaya Quayside to take the cool air.

Then, in the darkness of the lovely southern night, these block-ships would come to life with twinkling lanterns, and the silence of the bay would be broken by the long-drawn cries of the guards, hailing each other every five minutes.

The suburbs around the town came to life, too, with their little white houses, looking like clay huts, inhabited mostly by the families of retired and serving sailors, artillerymen, workers of the harbour shops, and generally poor work people.

The market-place, which was a sort of club for the greater part of the population living around Artillery Bay, was already swarming with people.

Noisy animated crowds filled the spaces between the stalls, the rows of hanging carcasses, wildfowl, and poultry, the

masses of greens and profusion of southern vegetables, the mounds of water-melons and fragrant melons and heaps of fruit from nearby orchards. People haggled, shouted, and wrangled. Here also the latest items of news were exchanged, and second-hand clothes and boots were offered for sale.

Fishing smacks loaded with fresh fish from the neighbouring little town of Balaklava stood close inshore. Almost every kind of fish native to the Black Sea was here—plaice, and mackerel, and grey mullet, and bullheads, and the little golden sultanka, which gourmands consider the most delicious fish in the Black Sea. Fresh-caught oysters were displayed in baskets as a special attraction for cooks and chefs.

Right next to the fish market a mob of urchins were bathing in the limpid water of the emerald-tinted inlet. They flung themselves into the water with boisterous laughter, splashing about, swimming and diving like ducks, vying with each other in skill, and showing off before the onlookers.

An incessant hum of talk hung over the market, which was flooded with the bright southern sunshine. The speech abounded in the corruptions peculiar to southern

towns, and was tinged with the soft accents of the Ukraine. Above this buzz of conversation there stood out the loud, rapid, and at the same time wheedling lisp of the vendors of fish and oysters, of halva and Turkish delight—those excitable Balaklava Greeks with swarthy, fleshy faces, hooked noses, languishing black eyes resembling large olives, and bared muscular arms the colour of dark bronze with which they jesticulated wildly. One could also hear the guttural speech of the Tatars squatting on their heels next to baskets filled with pears, grapes and apples, an expression of proud impassivity on their handsome faces whose classical features bespoke the pure Aryan blood of their ancestors—the Genoese and Greeks who once lived in the Crimea. At times, rising shrilly above the hum of the crowd, there could be heard the fervid oaths of the "ladies of the market"—the voluble, saucy sailor-wives, who offered their wares to the accompaniment of such picturesque blasphemy flavoured with genuine Russian improvisations that many a seasoned boatswain would have envied their powers of invention, which won them great success with the laughing market crowds.

It was the brimming busy life of a big seaport.

It never occurred to anybody in this noisy crowd, of course, that Sevastopol would soon lie in ruins, that these charming, animated little inlets would be deserted, and that above the surface of the roads where the Black Sea Fleet now rode at anchor, the mast-tops of sunken ships would stick out like crosses in a cemetery.

II

At seven o'clock on that cheerful sunny morning, in the nursery of the large residence of the Commander-in-Chief of the Port and the Military Governor of Sevastopol, a thin boy of eight or ten with a vivacious face and bright brown eyes was hastily finishing his toilet with the aid of his old nurse Agafya.

"Oh, hurry up, nanny, do! How slow you are!" the boy said in an impatient peremptory tone, as Agafya, a squat-bodied little woman, was leisurely combing out his thick, curly chestnut hair.

"Bless me, what a fidget you are! Can't you stand still for a minute? Always hurry-

scurry!" the nurse grumbled, the while she glanced affectionately at her pet. "For goodness' sake, stop twisting about or I'll never get your hair combed. You'll go about with a tousled head, like a street urchin."

But the boy, obviously, was unaffected by these admonitions and fretted at being detained so long while the sunbeams were dancing merrily in the room and currents of fresh air laden with the scents of the garden flowers were pouring in through the open window. He pulled his curly head out of his nurse's hands, and began swiftly putting on his jacket, smiling, happy, carefree.

"Wait a minute, dear, let me smooth those tufts down at least."

"They're good enough, nanny."

"Good enough indeed! Fancy an admiral's son going about with matted hair! If Papa notices it he's sure to scold you."

But Agafya's last words did not reach the boy's ears. Vasya loved his nurse and set her at naught. He knew only too well that she was utterly in his power and would carry out his every whim. He ran out of the nursery, buttoning up his jacket as he

went. Passing through a suite of rooms, he halted at the closed door of his father's study.

His gay expression was chased away by a look of anxiety. He tarried by the door for several seconds, nerving himself for the effort of going in, while the usual thought ran in his mind—the thought that going to his father's study every morning just for the sake of wishing him good morning was a most unpleasant duty that could very well be dispensed with.

"Still, I've got to," he said mentally, and quietly opening the door, he walked in.

At a writing desk in the large study, his eyes lowered to some papers, sat a tall gaunt old man in a light dressing-gown. His smooth-shaven wrinkled cheeks had a healthy bloom in them, and his hair was arranged in the old-fashioned manner, with a topknot of dark slightly greying hair standing up in the middle of his head like a cock's comb. Fie had a close-trimmed^ grey moustache with stiff waxed ends.

This fierce moustache, always an object of awe to the boy,, struck terror into his heart when it began to twitch with a quick nervous movement, which, together with a jerking of shoulders and working of jaw-

bones, was a sign of bad humour with the grim and inexorable admiral, whom everyone in the household, beginning with the admiral's own wife, stood in moral fear of.

"Good morning, Papa!" the boy stammered in a small voice as he approached the desk, his frightened eyes fixed on his, father's face with the spellbound look that one sees in the eyes of a little bird when confronted by a hawk.

Whether the father had heard his son's greeting and was deliberately ignoring it, as he had often done before, making the boy stand motionless by the desk for a minute or two that seemed an eternity, or whether, engrossed in his papers, he really did not notice Vasya, it is impossible to say. At any rate, he did not turn his head.

Several long seconds passed.

The shady spreading nut-trees with their big walnuts in green shells and the dense acacias through which no sunbeam could penetrate, peeped in through the open windows of the study, reminding Vasya that out there in the upper garden, well removed from the house, there awaited him pleasures, joys and delightful meetings of which none of his people suspected.

But his father's moustache did not stir, the cheek-bones on his wrinkled face remained perfectly still.

Screwing up his courage, the boy spoke again, slightly raising his soft high-pitched voice:

"Good morning, Papa!"

The admiral's head flew up, and his eyes rested on his youngest son with a grave fixed look that seemed to have a touch of annoyance in it.

Suddenly his stern features relaxed for a moment, and a look that was almost tender came into his hard little grey eyes which, despite the admiral's sixty years, retained all the vigour and sparkle of youth.

"Good morning!" the admiral said in a sharp brusque tone.

And contrary to his habit, he did not dismiss the boy with a nod, but patted his flushing cheek with a bony hand and went on in the same harsh peremptory tone:

"Keeping well, I hope? You'll be going to school soon in Odessa. You'll go by steamer on the first of September. Now run along!"

Vasya needed no second invitation.

He all but ran out of the study, and breathed a sigh of joyous relief, as if a weight had dropped from him, when he

found himself in the morning-room next to his mother's bedroom. She was still asleep, as were also his sisters.

After hastily swallowing a glass of milk which Agafya brought him, he furtively stuffed a few lumps of sugar into his pocket and ran out into the garden.

Passing the flower beds, the conservatories and hot-houses of the lower garden, he hastily skipped the short flights of steps dividing the terraces that ran deep into the vast garden with its long avenues bordered by thick trellises of grape-vine and straight rows of fruit-trees growing in neatly swarded beds right in the middle of the terraces. There were fruit-trees here of every description, richly laden with big downy peaches, juicy pears, large yellow and green plums, amber-coloured rennets, almonds, walnuts, and white and red mulberries.

This great terraced garden (it faced three streets and was enclosed within a stone wall) with its gorgeous flower beds around the house, its hot-houses and conservatories, its arbours entwined in sweet-smelling flowers, and its large wooden belvedere, which commanded a lovely view of Sevastopol and its environs,

and whence a year later Vasya, looking through a telescope, saw the long blue ribbon of the French troops moving across Inkerman valley towards the south side of the town—this garden was kept in perfect order and gladdened the eye by its dazzling cleanliness thanks chiefly to the labour of the convicts.

A gang of twelve or fifteen of them entered the garden through a back gate as soon as the sun rose above the town and worked there till three or four o'clock, while the two soldiers who escorted them dozed leaning on their rifles somewhere near the gate or within the garden.

The convicts came here to work every day except Sunday, and usually they were the same men. They brought water up in buckets, watered the beds, weeded them, trimmed the trees, swept the paths, strewed the avenues with gravel, then rammed[1] them down smooth—in a word, they did everything that! the head gardener, a neat methodical German by the name of' Karl Karlovich, ordered them to do. The work was not very heavy, and the convicts, apparently' glad to have been given this garden job, tried their hardest to please.

It was these men, serving severe sentences for their crimes, that Vasya hurried to join.

III

Although his mother and sisters had strictly forbidden him to go near these outcasts, leave alone speak to them, the boy ran swiftly from terrace to terrace and cast eager glances down the long avenues, looking forward with pleasure to having a chat with the prisoners and sharing their breakfast—a chunk of red juicy water-melon eaten with a lump of brown bread with a lot of salt on it. The convicts for their part were only too pleased to share their frugal meal with him.

He found this breakfast more delicious than anything in the world—tastier by far than all the dainty dishes served at the table—and he felt free and easy in the company of these men with shaved heads and clanking shackles, far more so than he. ever did at home, especially during dinner, when everyone sat around silent and glum, and he had to force the nasty soup down his throat so as not to incur the displeasure

of his always moody father, and wait in tortured, impatient silence for the meal to end, not daring to stir a limb until it did.

He had made the acquaintance of the convicts and become friendly with them only that summer, owing to his habit of, running about the garden by himself (he was left largely to his own devices). Until then he had been very much afraid of them, and whenever he had gone into the upper garden to treat, himself to some fruit he had tried to slip past them at a safe distance and always at a run. He had believed those men in grey caps, who were digging the garden or carting sand about in barrows, to be capable of committing the most wicked deeds imaginable, even, as his nurse Agafya had assured him when he was a little boy, of stealing naughty boys such as he, roasting them alive and eating them, admirals' sons or not. His nurse's words had deeply impressed him at the time, although the others, his mother, sisters and brothers, for example, had never gone so far in their accusations. At least, he had not heard Agafya's statement actually corroborated by anyone. However, remarks about the convicts that were sometimes dropped in the boy's presence

left no room for doubt that they were men who had more vices than one could possibly count, and if they were set at large they would soon show you what's what! No wonder they had their heads shaved and were kept in irons.

That is what a guest of Vasya's mother—an undersized old general—once said, expressing his indignation at the fact that the convicts had complained about their food being bad and their not getting the full rations they were entitled to. Himself apparently implicated in the embezzlement of convict funds, that old gentleman never, of course, suspected that very soon, when Sevastopol would be threatened by the enemy, these very same convicts would be set free and their chains knocked off, and that they would become valiant defenders of the besieged city along with all the others.

All these stories provoked the boy's curiosity, and notwithstanding the fear which those terrible men inspired him with, he sometimes plucked up sufficient courage to watch them—from a safe distance, of course, where he could take to his heels at the first sign of danger.

Snatches of talk that reached his ears, the humming of a song during work and other outward signs of a most peaceful and benevolent nature did not at all fit in with his previous notions and the reports that he had heard, and somewhat shook his belief in Agafya's testimony. Two facts struck him most forcibly.

One day in the spring he had witnessed the following scene. One of the convicts, a tall, dark, beetle-browed, elderly man with large deep-set sombre eyes, whom Vasya thought to be the most terrible of the gang, seeing a baby sparrow fall out of its nest, went up to it at once, picked it up carefully, climbed the tree and put it back in the nest to the great joy of mother sparrow, who was fluttering around all atwitter with anxiety. And when he got down and went back to strewing sand on the path out of his barrow, his face, to Vasya's surprise, was shining with a kind, gentle look.

On another occasion the convicts had found a homeless puppy in the garden—a thin, shivering, miserable little thing—and had treated it with infinite kindness. Vasya had seen them feeding chewed bits of brown bread into the puppy's mouth, then they covered it up carefully with rags, and

afterwards he heard them talk about taking it back with them. They had all looked very pleased at that decision.

"It will only die here," the same evil-looking convict with the tufted brows had said. "I'll look after it, boys, be a sort of nurse to it, you know!" he had added with a merry laugh.

One thing at least was clear to Vasya from these evidences—that these men, terrible though they might be, were not devoid of kindly feelings.

To resolve his doubts, he eventually sought the advice of the old sailor Kiril, who served in the house as a footman. Was it true, Vasya asked him, that the convicts stole little boys and ate them?

By way of reply, Kiril, habitually a grave, dignified and rather sombre man, laughed so heartily, his big mouth wide open, that Vasya was quite put out, and guessed that he must have made a fool of himself by asking what was apparently a very silly question.

"Who told you that, Master Vasya?" Kiril said when he had recovered from his fit of laughter.

"Nurse."

"Of all the stupid old wives' tales! She tells you a cock-and-bull story and you go and swallow it! Whoever heard of anyone eating human beings! It's out of all knowledge—ask anyone you like. There is an island, though, way off beyond the ocean, where cannibals live—wild men, you know, who look like monkeys—well, they really -eat human flesh, they do, the blighters! I got it from a siailor—a deep-water man who's been all over the world. They eat rats, too, for that matter, and all kinds of insects, and snakes, and they'll eat a human being if he's not one of their own and has had the bad luck to fall into their clutches. As for eating little boys anywhere, there's no other place that I know of. Bless me, there isn't a man in any Christian country, leave alone a Russian, who'd do a thing like that. Your nurse was just trying to put the wind up you, that's all. What d'you expect of a woman! Only an addle-headed ninny can spin such silly yarns to a child!" Kiril added disdainfully.

"Oh, but I didn't believe what she told me. As if I don't know that people don't eat human beings!" the boy protested, stung to the quick. "I just asked. The convicts are not frightful at all—I know that," Vasya

added in a rather tentative tone, secretly desirous of obtaining enlightenment on that score from such a knowledgeable man as he considered Kiril to be.

"Why should they be? They're human beings like the rest of us. They're just unlucky men, you know, unfortunates."

"What did they do to be made convicts, Kiril?"

"There's all kinds of reasons, sir. They were all soldiers or sailors, you know. Discipline there is so strict, it doesn't take much for a fellow to get into trouble. But some of them are guilty of real bad offences, I must say. Things like robbery, you know, or thieving—caught red-handed. And so they're paying for their sins. But some are suffering for kicking against the pricks."

"What's that?" Vasya said blankly.

"I mean a man who couldn't stand the tyranny, whose soul rebelled against the hidings and floggings. A rude word to his superior officer and there you were—a convict's jacket for him! Or else drunkenness would do the trick for him. There are any number of reasons. You never know when you may land in a convict gang."

"But what for?"

"For anything. A fellow with a hot temper, say, runs up against some brute of a commander, who flogs his men for the least trifle without rhyme or reason, one might say. Well, this chap will put up with it as long as he can, but one day his patience will give out and in a fit of anger he'll talk back to his superior. He'll be given short shrift. They'll make him run the gauntlet. . . carry him out half dead, then pack him off to a convict gang. Don't you believe a word your nurse tells you about them, sir. You needn't be afraid of them, or look down on them. They're to be pitied, if anything, sir."

After these explanations, which dovetailed so neatly, as it were, with his own observations, Vasya did not fear the convicts half so much as he did before. He ventured to approach them at closer quarters and take a good look at them. They had quite ordinary faces, for the most part good-natured ones, without a hint of evil in them. They talked, joked, and laughed just like any other people, and they ate—so Vasya thought—with the heartiest appetite and relish he had ever seen.

One morning, as Vasya was gazing hungrily at the convicts polishing off chunks of salted brown bread and washing them down with water, one of them offered him a taste of "convict's bread" with such cordiality that Vasya accepted, and ate two chunks with pleasure in their company. They had all looked at him so kindly and talked with him so good-naturedly that Vasya was very sorry when the break was over and the men went back to their jobs with friendly nods to their recent guest.

This was the beginning of a fast friendship between the admiral's son and the convicts, a friendship about which Vasya, of course, did not breathe a word at home, knowing that he would be anything but patted on the back for it. And the better he got to know the convicts the more convinced did he become that his nurse, and his mother, and his sisters, and the undersized old general were positively mistaken in thinking them to be evil men. On the contrary, Vasya thought them to be nice kind men, and could not help wondering why such people, who worked so hard, treated him so well, gave him presents of toys they had made themselves, and regaled him with such

hospitality, should have had their heads shaved and their legs locked in irons, which prevented the poor fellows from running about the way he did.

Vasya was on good terms with all his new acquaintances, but his particular favourite was a young, slim, fair-haired convict with kindly blue eyes. He did not know what this man's offence had been and did not care to know, deciding, for some reason, that it must have been something trivial.

He felt a special liking for this convict with the wistful eyes. He liked him for the excellent stories he told, for his gentle voice, for the fact that he was so often sad, and for his wonderfully kind and pleasant smile—in a word, he liked everything about him.

The man's name was Maxim. The convicts called him also "skylark," because he often sang songs during his work and sang them beautifully.

Sometimes, as the boy listened to his songs, which were full of ineffable sadness, a feeling of infinite pity for the singer in irons gripped the boy's little heart, and tears welled up in his eyes.

Often, overcome by emotion, he would run away.

IV

Vasya came into the garden just in time.

The convicts had just knocked off for half an hour and sat about singly and in knots in the shade of the wall at the end of one of the avenues, breakfasting of their brown bread ration and cheap water-melons, which they had bought with their own money.

Vasya ran up to them gay, flushed, full of the joy of life, nodding cheerfully in answer to the greetings that met him on all sides:

"Did you sleep well, Master Vasya?"

"Did nurse frighten you again?"

"Would you like a piece of melon, sir?"

"Try mine, it's a nice one!"

"The young master's going to have his breakfast with Maxim. Maxim's specially bought a big water-melon."

"But where is he?" the boy asked, looking round for his friend.

"Over there under the vines, all on his own. Go and join him, son, and cheer him up a bit. He's down in the mouth again."

"Why?"

"You ask him. I suppose he hasn't got used to jail life yet . . . pining away like a bird in a cage."

"On top of that he got it from the corporal yesterday," put in the darkish elderly convict with the shaggy eyebrows that gave his pock-marked face a fierce look.

"What for?" Vasya asked.

"If you ask me, I'd say just for nothing at all. Maxim didn't notice the corporal and didn't step out of the way, so the devil punched him in the jaw—first with his right, then with his left. It's as much as a man can stand, don't you think so, son? I could understand if there was any reason for it, but for nothing at all—!" the elderly convict explained.

Vasya, who already knew by experience how bitter it was to be sometimes punished unfairly, just because his father happened to lose his temper or his mother to be in a bad humour, hastened to agree that it was really a shame, and that the corporal who had hit Maxim was indeed a devil whom for two pins he would have given a "jaw-buster."

These words, borrowed from the slang vocabulary of the convicts, elicited laughing approval. The "young master," praised for "a sensible lad," hastened to join his friend Maxim.

"Good morning, Maxim!" he said, crawling in under the vines, where he found the young convict sitting on the ground with slices of water-melon and chunks of brown bread laid out next to him.

"Good morning, Master Vasya!" Maxim answered in his soft voice, which had a strong Ukrainian accent. "Did you sleep well? Try this water-melon—it's good. Help yourself." He handed Vasya a thick slice of melon and a chunk of bread, smiling at him kindly with his big sad eyes. "I've been waiting for you."

"Thank you, Maxim. I'll sit next to you. Do you mind?"

"Why should I? Sit down, son. It's nice and cool here."

Vasya sat down and took out of his pocket a few lumps of sugar and a pinch of tea wrapped up in paper. He gave these to the convict, saying:

"This is for you. You'll make yourself some tea."

"Thank you, son. You have a good heart. Only I'm afraid you might get into trouble, taking tea and sugar out of the house."

"I won't get into trouble, Maxim, you needn't worry. No one will find out . . . they're all asleep indoors. Only Papa is up, and he's in his study. Why, we have lots of tea and sugar!" he hastened to explain by way of reassuring his friend, and started polishing off the juicy water-melon with evident enjoyment, taking a bite at his brown bread every now and again. The juice ran down his jacket, but he took no notice of it.

Maxim put the tea and sugar away in his pocket and started on his lunch too.

"Have some more, son," he said, seeing that Vasya had already eaten his slice.

"There won't be enough left for you," the boy said, obviously hovering between a desire to have another piece and a fear of robbing his friend of his share.

"There's plenty. Besides, I don't feel like eating today."

"I'll have another little piece, then."

Soon the water-melon and the bread were finished with, and then Vasya said:

"Why do you look so sad, Maxim?"

"Being a convict is nothing to be cheerful about, son."

"Do the irons hurt you?"

"A prisoner's life is hell. It was bad enough in the service, but this is still worse."

"What were you—a soldier or a sailor?"

"A sailor. I served under Captain Bogatov—maybe you heard about him, son? He was our commander on the Tartararkhou."

"I know him. He comes to our house. He's a fat man with a big tummy."

"Well, it was through that man that I became a convict. I hope to God he gets his deserts in the next world for ruining my life."

"Were you rude to him?"

"Yes, I was that. I'd been the quietest and meekest of sailors, son, but he almost drove me out of my mind. He flogged me like hell!"

"But what for?"

"For anything. Innocent or guilty. For ship duties. I lay in hospital twice because of him. It was more than flesh and blood could stand. Well, I called him a brute. . . . A brute he is. That settled my hash, son. They passed sentence on me. I was made to run the gauntlet, and then thrown into a

convict prison. Better I had put up with it all a bit longer. Maybe we'd have got rid of that man and served under someone else who was less of a brute. At least a sailor has liberty of a sort. But here, son, you know yourself what a convict's life is. It's just hell. Anyone can order you .about, insult you. Naturally—you're just nobody, a convict," Maxim wound up bitterly.

Vasya, who had been listening to him with deep sympathy, said, after a few moments of thoughtful silence, with an air of firm decision:

"Then why don't you run away if you feel so bad, Maxim?"

A gleam of joy kindled in the convict's eyes when he heard these words, and he answered:

"What do you think? I'd have run away long ago if I had the chance. I'd have gone home."

"Where is your home?"

"In the Kamenets-Podolsk Gubernia. Maybe you heard of the town Proskurov? Well, our village is about ten versts from the town. I'd have taken a look at Mother and Father, and tried my luck across the Austrian frontier," Maxim went on in an excited whisper, his whole animated aspect

bearing witness, as it were, to the fact that he had long been cherishing this dream of escape in secret. "But don't tell anyone about this, young master, otherwise I'll be flogged to death!" he added with a sudden pang of fear at having disclosed his secret to the boy. He might easily let it out!

Vasya crossed himself fervently and swore with tears in his eyes that no living soul would ever know what Maxim had told him. Maxim could rest assured that he would never be flogged through him. Although he was a little boy, he could keep his word as well as anybody.

Maxim's mind apparently being set at ease by this assurance, Vasya, fired by the idea of Maxim's escape across the Austrian frontier (of which, by the way, he had the haziest of notions) continued in the earnest, mysterious tone of a conspirator:

"You say you can't escape, but I think it's ever so easy."

"How, Master Vasya?" Maxim asked with a gentle smile.

"You knock off those irons here in our garden. I'll bring you a hammer. And then you climb over the wall and run off to the Austrian frontier." Maxim smiled sadly.

"In these convict's clothes? Why, they'll catch me in no time."

"Not if you do it in the night."

"You can't run away from the block-ship in the night. We're under lock and key, and besides, the guards would shoot me."

Vasya's excited face clouded, and he uttered sadly:

"So there's no way of escape?"

The convict said nothing, but his silence had a tense quality in it. A sudden thought seemed to have struck him, and his thin pale face grew excited and his eyes sparkled. He fixed on the boy an anxious searching look, as if he would probe into his very soul, as if he wanted to say something but could not bring himself to speak.

"Why don't you speak, Maxim? Are you afraid that I will give you away?" the boy said in a pained tone.

"No, son. You would not harm a poor convict. You have a kind heart," Maxim said earnestly, and as though coming to an important decision, he added in a whisper: "As for running away, the thing can be done, but not the way you say, Master Vasya."

"How then?"

"If I could get a dress, say. . . ."

"What dress?"

"A woman's—one like those your nurse wears."

"A woman's?" the boy queried.

"Yes, and a shawl to go with it, something to cover the head, you know. Then there'd be some chance!"

For a second Vasya was lost in thought, then he said with an air of determination:

"I'll get you nurse's dress and shawl."

"You— ?"

Agitation prevented him from going on. Suddenly he seized the boy's hand, pressed it to his lips and covered it with kisses.

Vasya in turn embraced the convict and kissed him.

"But how will you do it? What if they catch you?"

"Don't you worry, Maxim. No one will catch me. I'll go about it cleverly, when everyone's asleep. Only where shall I put the things?"

"Here, under the vine. And cover them up with leaves to hide them."

"Perhaps I'd better cover them up with earth? What do you think, Maxim?" the boy asked with a grave business-like air.

"There's no need to go to all that trouble, son. Leaves will do. No one ever comes here."

"All right. I'll bring the things here first thing tomorrow morning. Or better still in the night, maybe. I won't be afraid to go out in the garden at night. What's there to be afraid of?"

"God bless you, son. I'll pray for you all my life."

"Hey! Fall to!" sounded the voice of the guard from a distance.

"I'll come and see you again, Maxim. This is the last day we shall see each other. You won't be here tomorrow," the boy said with a touch of sadness in his voice.

With these words he crawled out of the vineyard and went back to the house.

V

Absorbed in the forthcoming enterprise, Vasya went about all day in a state of great excitement and never stopped to think of the consequences that threatened if his father got to know of what he had done. The plan for carrying off the nurse's dress and the hammer, which he had seen lying

about in her room the day before, engrossed him completely. He had already reconnoitred his nurse's room during the day and made a special note of those two articles. The day dragged on as if it would never end. He kept running out into the garden, pacing the paths with a preoccupied air, and often ran up to Maxim when he saw him alone to exchange a few words with him in a mysterious tone.

"Good-bye, Maxim dear. . . . Perhaps tomorrow this time you will be far, far away," he murmured with tears in his eyes just as the convicts were about to leave.

"Good-bye, Master Vasya," the convict whispered, gazing at the boy with a look of inexpressible gratitude.

The prisoners were lined up and marched off with a clank of irons. Vasya lingered long there, gazing after them.

Fortunately no one in the house noticed the boy's excitement. True, his father glanced twice at the boy during dinner with a look that made Vasya quail. He had a feeling that his father had read his mind and was going to shout at him: "I know what you are up to, you young rascal!"

But instead his father merely asked:

"Why don't you eat?"

"I am eating, Papa."

"Too little. Dinner is meant to be eaten!" he shouted.

And Vasya, who did not have the slightest appetite, dutifully stuffed his mouth full, secretly glad that his father had no inkling of what was afoot.

Later in the afternoon the hammer was safely stowed away under Vasya's bed. He went to bed earlier than usual that day, despite the fact that there had been guests that evening who had been telling interesting stories.

When he had gone up to kiss his mother good-night, she had looked at him anxiously and touched his forehead.

"Are you feeling well, Vasya?" she asked. "Your face is burning."

"I am all right, Mamma. Just a bit tired." He kissed her soft white hand, bade his sisters and the guests good-night, and ran off to the nursery, pleased that he had not had to say good-night to his father, who was not at home.

"Bedtime, nanny!" he cried.

"Why so early? Had a busy day, son?"

"Yes, I'm tired, nanny," he said, avoiding her eyes with the guilty feeling of one who

was planning to rob an unsuspecting victim.

Nurse undressed him and proposed a bedtime story, but Vasya said he was sleepy.

"Then go to sleep, my dear."

She kissed him, made the sign of the cross over him, and was about to leave the room when Vasya suddenly said:

"You know what, nanny, I'll make you a present of a new dress after my birthday."

"Thank you, dearie. What has put that idea into your head? I have more dresses than I can wear as it is."

"How many have you got?"

"Why, at least six, not counting the two woollen ones."

"Ah!" the boy said, his mind set at ease, and added: "In that case, nanny, I'll buy you something else. After my birthday I'll have lots of money."

"It's a kind little heart you have. Thank you for the promise. And now, go to sleep. I'm going to bed too."

After a while Vasya heard the snores of his nurse Agafya in the next room.

His nerves were so taut that he could not fall asleep, and he decided to stay awake until the rest of the house was asleep and

he could safely make his way into the garden through the morning-room door, which was usually kept locked and had the key in it. His mother would not hear him, and his father's Bedroom was at the other end of the house. If it came to that he could jump out of the window—it wasn't very high.

He could hear the sound of the ships' bells striking every half hour, and the long-drawn monotonous cries of the sentries hailing one another in the distance. He lay there repeating to-himself over and over again that he must not, he dare not, fall asleep, and thinking of how he would open the window, make sure that the coast was clear, and go into his nurse's room on: tiptoe for the dress; he was thinking of Maxim, too, and how glad he would be tomorrow, and how he would get across the Austrian frontier. He would be happy there, and no one would catch him. No one would ever know that he, Vasya, had helped him to escape. It would be so nice to feel that he had been his saviour. His excited brain thronged with thoughts and carried him off at a tangent. He would make a bolt across the Austrian frontier, too, if he felt miserable in that boarding

school in Odessa they were going to send him to in September and if trey tried to flog him there. At home Father flogged him, but he would not stand it from anyone else! He'd run away for certain, hunt out Maxim and they would live together. The idea struck him as attractive, but suddenly it gave way to another idea still more attractive: he saw himself a grown-up man, a general, after a long absence suddenly riding up to the house on a magnificent white horse, and everyone being amazed. And Father would not flog him—he'd be a grown-up man—and he'd be astonished that his son, so young, was already a general. And his mother, his sisters and brothers—they'd all be astonished and would congratulate him. And he'd tell them why he had run away and how he had distinguished himself in the war.

"Splendid!" he thought, stretching himself, and but dimly conscious whether this was a waking or sleeping dream.

"I mustn't sleep!" he whispered to himself, and the next instant he fell asleep. He woke up as if he had been prodded in the ribs and sat up quickly, terrified at the thought that he had overslept and let Maxim down. For the moment he could not

make out what time of the day or night it was. He rubbed his eyes and looked round. A faint light glimmered through the white curtain. Thank God, it wasn't too late yet!

He leapt from his bed, pulled the curtain aside and looked out. Day was only just breaking and the garden was still, wrapt in semi-gloom.

"It's just time!"

Barefooted, he crept into his nurse's room, took the dress and shawl lying near the bed, and returned to his own room. It took him only a few seconds to dress and make a bundle of the stolen articles with the aid of two towels.

It remained for him to decide how he was to get out into the garden—through the window or the morning-room door. Quietly he opened the window, looked down and drew back. It was much too high. He took off his boots and went out through the door in his stockinged feet.

With a pounding heart and bated breath, he crept down the corridor past his sisters' rooms and came out at last into the morning-room. He made straight for the door. Carefully he turned the key—once, twice. . . . The noise it made was terrifying. He stood transfixed for a moment, then

dashed out into the garden, taking the steps at a bound. At last he reached the second upper terrace. Rushing headlong down the garden path, he put the dress away in the hiding-place, heaped vine leaves over it and sped back to the house.

He got there in safety and crawled back into his bed, trembling from head to foot. He was at once wildly happy and frightened to death. What if he were found out and his father ordered him to be thrown into a convict prison for what he had done?

VI

He woke up late the next day to find his nurse standing over him. He recollected his adventures of the night before and glanced at her. She looked all right, her usual cheerful and kindly self, and apparently suspected nothing. She was wearing a different shawl, though.

"Bless me, what a sleepyhead you are today! Get up, it's past eight."

Vasya tumbled out of bed, dressed hastily, and allowed his nurse to comb his hair out properly for once.

"Have you seen my shawl anywhere, Vasya? I've been looking for it all over the place," she said worriedly, searching Vasya's bed.

"No, nanny, I haven't seen it."

"Funny thing," the old woman muttered.

"Don't you worry, nanny, I'll buy you a new one."

"It's not that. I don't care about the shawl. What 1 can't understand is where it could have got to."

And when Vasya was ready, the nurse said:

"Your Papa is in a bad temper today."

"Why?"

"There's been some trouble, Vasya."

"Trouble? What trouble, nanny?"

"A convict escaped from our garden this morning."

Vasya's heart leapt with joy, but he tried to conceal his emotion, and asked with an air of studied unconcern:

"Did he? How did he manage to escape?"

"That's the funny part about it. They've only just found out he is missing. He left his convict's clothes behind and ran away. Everyone's wondering where he got other clothes from. He couldn't have run away

naked. There's a regular to-do about it. The guards' officer is questioning everyone. It's been reported to your Papa too. He's ever so angry. Fancy a convict escaping from the governor's own garden!"

Vasya went into his father's study for the morning ritual more dead than alive. The admiral was indeed in a bad humour and responded to his son's "Good morning, Papa" with a brief absent nod. Vasya left him immensely relieved. Obviously his father knew nothing. Presently Vasya heard his angry shouts, the object of which was the chief of the local police who had come to report.

Vasya spent an anxious day, expecting at any moment to be summoned before his father and put through a rigorous interrogation.

But no one bothered him. During dinner his father was in an almost cheerful mood and even deigned to take his wife, a tall portly woman who still retained traces of her former beauty, into his confidence.

"Did you hear what happened this morning? A convict has escaped from our garden, the canaille!"

"But how could he?"

"The other convicts say he had a bundle with him when he left the block-ship. He must have had some clothes in it. Changed and ran away. That commandant has given them too much rein. I've given him a piece of my mind already. The guards are lax too. But never mind, he won't run far. They'll catch him today or tomorrow, I daresay. After he's been made to run the gauntlet he won't have any desire to try it again."

Vasya's heart sank. Would they really catch Maxim?

However, several days later when his mother asked whether the convict had been caught, the admiral growled:

"No. He seems to have vanished into thin air, the scoundrel! And they simply can't find out where he got the clothes from."

And a week later, when Vasya, all his fears allayed, went out into the garden in the morning, the elderly convict with the black shaggy eyebrows, who was lopping dead branches off a tree, beckoned mysteriously to the boy, and when he came up close thrust into his hand, when no one was looking, a cheap little cross and whispered:

"Maxim asked me to give this to you, Master Vasya."

He looked at the boy kindly and added in a voice full of tenderness:

"God bless you for your kind heart, son!"

MAN OVERBOARD!

I

THE broiling heat of the tropical day was beginning to abate. The sun was slowly gliding towards the horizon. Borne along by a gentle trade wind, the clipper, under full canvas, was slipping through the waters of the Atlantic at about seven knots. The sea was deserted: there was not a sail, not a puff of smoke to be seen. Wherever you

looked there was the same boundless watery plain, slightly agitated and murmuring with a mysterious rumbling sound: on every side the horizon was bordered by the transparent blue of the cloudless sky. The air was soft and clear, laden with the healthy tang of the sea. All round was a wilderness. . . .

Now and again a fly-fish would leap into the air, its bright scales glittering like gold in the rays of the sun; or a white albatross would soar overhead; or a little petrel would speed past, hurrying on its way to distant Africa; or there would be the noise of a jet of water sent up by a whale. Then again not a living creature all round. Nothing but ocean and sky, sky and ocean —both serene, gentle and smiling.

"Will you permit the singers to sing, sir?" the petty officer of the watch asked, going up to the officer of the deck who was idly pacing the bridge.

The officer nodded and a few minutes later the sad sweeping sound of a country song rang out over the ocean.

Thankful for the cool of evening after a day of sweltering heat, the sailors crowded in the forecastle to listen to the singers. The lovers of music, especially the older

men, formed a close circle round the singers and listened intently and gravely, many a sun-tanned, weather-beaten face radiant with silent rapture.

Forecastle-man Lavrentich, an "old reliable," leaned his body forward. He was a broad-shouldered, stooping old man with hard, slightly crooked legs and knotty, tarry hands, from one of which a finger was missing (it had been torn off by the topsail halyard many years before). An inveterate drunkard, he was always being brought back from shore senseless and with a battered face: he had a habit of picking quarrels with foreign sailors because "they didn't drink proper, and just showed off," mixing their rum with water, whereas he, Lavrentich, gulped it down neat. Yet even he, when listening to the singing, sank into a kind of languor, and his furrowed face with its bristling moustache and purple, plum-like nose—habitually sullen face, as though its owner were annoyed and about to let loose a torrent of abuse—now looked uncommonly gentle, softened by an expression of quiet wistfulness.

Some of the other sailors quietly joined in the singing, while the rest sat round the deck in small groups, talking softly and

now and again expressing their approval by smiles or exclamations.

And this choir of ours could sing! The voices were all young and clear and fresh, and the songs excellently rehearsed.

The crew were especially delighted by the rich, velvety tenor voice of the second singer, Shutikov. It stood out from the others by virtue of its enchanting sincerity and warmth of expression.

"He grips your ruddy guts, the blighter!" the men used to say of him.

Song followed song, reminding the sailors, out there amid the warmth and glitter of the tropics, of their faraway Russian homeland with its snows and its frosts, its fields and forests and thatched huts, and its sorrows and poverty so near to one's heart.

"Let's have a dance tune, boys!"

The choir struck up a lively dancing-song. This time Shutikov's voice so trilled, so rang with jollity and audacity, that it brought a smile to the men's faces and made even the steadiest of them jerk their shoulders and tap their feet.

One of the ratings, a pert little sailor called Makarka, whose lean braced body had long been feeling the itch to dance,

finally succumbed to the rollicking tune and started a lively trepak *(Trepak, a dance.—Tr.)* to the delight of the onlookers. At last singing and dancing came to an end. And when Shutikov, a slim, well-knit, dark-complexioned sailor, left the circle and went to the water-tub to get a smoke, a chorus of approval followed him.

"You sing mighty well, devil take you!" said old Lavrentich, shaking his head. And he added, by way of emphasis, one or two unprintable swear-words.

"If he were to get some training now, and learn thoroughbass, say, he could go into Opera," piped up our young clerk, Pugovkin, a soldier's son, who liked to show off his good manners and refined expressions.

Lavrentich, who loathed "quill drivers," thinking all such people utterly useless on a ship, and who considered himself in honour bound, as it were, to take every opportunity of snubbing them, scowled at the chubby, fair-haired, good-looking clerk, and said:

"Opera your grandmother! You've swollen your ruddy belly with loafing—that's Opera for you."

There was laughter among the sailors.

"Do you know what Opera is?" said the young clerk, disconcerted. "What ignorant people!" he added in an undertone, and judiciously made himself scarce.

"How d'you like that educated sissy!" Lavrentich said contemptuously as Pugovkin walked away, and added some racy swear-words as was his wont—but this time in an anything but amiable tone.

"As I was saying," he went on, after a moment's silence, addressing Shutikov, "you sing mighty fine, Yegorka."

"To be sure he does. He's a smart fellow, our Yegorka is!" said another of the sailors.

Shutikov merely grinned at the praise, revealing white, even teeth beneath his full, genial lips.

And that pleased smile, bright and clear as a child's, radiating the soft features of his young, fresh, sun-tanned face; those large dark eyes which looked as gentle and affectionate as a puppy's; and his neat, sturdy figure, which though lean and supple had something of a peasant's awkwardness in it—all this attracted and predisposed you to him from the start, as did his wonderful voice itself. Shutikov was a great favourite on board. Everybody

loved him and he, it seemed, loved everybody.

He was one of those rare, happy, exuberant natures, the very sight of which makes other people feel more happy and light-hearted. People of this kind are innate philosophers—optimists, as it were. His hearty laughter was often to be heard on the clipper. If he was telling a story, he would be the first to laugh at it and infect the others with his laugh, though the stories themselves may not have been particularly amusing. When cleaning a block, or scraping the paint off the ship's boat or whiling away a night's watch, sheltering from the wind behind a mast, he would hum a tune to himself, and, smiling his gentle smile all the time, make everyone around him feel cheerful, too. And his gay spirits didn't desert him at times when others were on the point of losing courage. At moments like those he was invaluable.

I remember one storm we were in. A fierce wind was blowing, the storm was raging all around us, and the ship, under storm-sails, was being tossed about on the ocean swell like a splinter of wood. At every moment it seemed as though the

heaving waves would swallow us up. The ship was quivering all over and groaning plaintively, blending her complaints with the howl of the wind as it tore through the rigging. Even old salts, who had been through the mill, were brooding and silent and kept their eyes fixed on the bridge, where the captain, his tall figure muffled in a raincoat, stood rooted to his post, as it were, gazing out keen-eyed into the raging storm.

Yet Shutikov, at this time, holding on to the rigging with one hand so as to keep on his feet, was entertaining a small group of frightened-looking sailors huddled round the mast by chatting to them unconcernedly about things which had nothing to do with the storm. He "yarned" so calmly and matter-of-factly about some amusing village incident, and laughed so cheerfully when the flying spray fell on his face, that his calm involuntarily communicated itself to the young sailors and drove away their fear.

"And where in hell did you learn to sing like that?" Lavrentich said, puffing at his short pipe. "We had a fellow on the Kostyenkin—he sang very well, the rogue, I

must say—but not half as well as you do. . . ."

"I just picked it up when I was a herdsman. The grazing herd would scatter all over the forest and I'd sit under a birch-tree and sing. . . . The singing herdsman,' they used to call me in the village," he added, smiling.

All the other sailors smiled with him, while Lavrentich patted him on the back and, as a sign of special favour, swore in the gentlest tones his drink-ruined old voice was capable of.

II

Just then, pushing the others aside, a stocky, middle-aged sailor named Ignatov burst into the circle.

White and distraught, and with no cap on his round, close-cropped head, he announced in a voice quivering with fury that somebody had robbed him.

"Twenty francs, brothers! Twenty francs!" he repeated plaintively, emphasizing the number.

This news upset everyone. Such happenings were rare on the clipper.

The older men frowned. The young sailors, annoyed at Ignatov having put a sudden end to their cheerful mood, listened with thrilled curiosity rather than sympathy, as, gasping and wildly waving his smooth hands, he hurriedly recounted the details of the robbery. Only that day, he said, when the crew were resting after dinner, he'd looked in his sea-chest, and all, God be thanked, was in its place, but just now when he'd gone down to get some shoe-leather, he'd found the lock broken—and the money missing.

"What sort of goings-on is that? To rob a shipmate!" he concluded, embracing the group in a roaming glance.

His smooth, plump, clean-shaven, freckled face with its little round eyes and hawk-like nose—a face which was normally characterized my self-restraint and by the self-satisfied, stolid mien of a clever man who knew his worth—was now distorted by the despair of a miser who had lost his hoard. His lower jaw quivered and his round eyes flitted from face to face distractedly. Obviously the robbery had completely demoralized him and brought to light his mean, miserly nature.

This was not to be wondered at as Ignatov, whom his shipmates had begun calling by his full name—a sign of respect—was mean and close-fisted. His sole object in volunteering for an overseas voyage, leaving a wife—a market-woman—with two children in Kronstadt, had been to make enough money to retire and go into business in a small way. He led a life of great abstemiousness, never touched alcohol and never spent money ashore. He saved money farthing by farthing, knew all the places where one could change gold and silver at a profit, and sometimes—in

great secret—gave small loans out at an interest to shipmates he could be sure of. He was a shrewd man, and calculated to make money by bringing back cigars and various Eastern wares to sell in Russia. He had been engaged in this kind of business before, when sailing in the Gulf of Finland in summer-time; he used to buy up sprats in Revel and cigars in Helsingfors and then sell them at a profit in Kronstadt. Ignatov was a helmsman; did his duties conscientiously, was at pains to keep on the right side of the rest of the crew, made friends with the storekeeper and the mate, could read and write, and was careful not to let his shipmates know that he was, for a sailor, flush with money.

"It's that scoundrel Proshka. It was he—I'm sure of it," he went on, boiling with rage. "He was hanging around when I went to my chest. . . . What's to be done with him, boys?" he asked, addressing himself principally to the older sailors, as if seeking their support. "Am I to be allowed to be robbed like this?. . . It's hard-earned money. You know yourselves what a sailor's money is. I'd saved it up farthing by farthing . . . I never even drink my vodka

allowance," he added in a humble, plaintive tone.

Although there was no evidence pointing to his guilt other than the fact that he'd been "hanging around" the lower deck, neither Ignatov nor. the other sailors had any doubt that Proshka Zhitin was the culprit, as he had been caught pilfering from his comrades several times before. Not a voice was raised in his defence. On the contrary, many of the men heaped furious abuse on his head.

"The dirty crook! He's a disgrace to our calling!" said Lavrentich vehemently.

"Yes. We've got a black sheep on board and no mistake."

"We'll have to teach him a lesson that he won't forget, the dirty good-for-nothing."

"Well, boys, what are we going to do with him?" said Ignatov. "If he doesn't return my money of his own free will, I propose to have him reported to the chief officer. Then there can be a proper inquiry."

The idea, pleasing though it was to Ignatov, did not meet with the forecastle's support, however. The forecastle had its own unwritten code of laws, the stern

guardians of which—like priests of ancient time—were the older sailors.

Lavrentich was the first to express his strong disapproval.

"An official report, you say?" he said contemptuously. "Want to blow the gaff, do you? . . . So mad that you forget our rule, it seems. . . . Eh, you . . . people!" And the old man relieved his feelings by adorning the word with one of his favourite epithets. "How can you suggest a thing like that and call yourself a sailor?" he went on, casting a not particularly amiable glance at Ignatov.

"What do you suggest then?"

"I suggest doing what's always been done. Give the son of a bitch a good hiding and take your money back. That's how we sailors do these things."

"He's had hidings enough before. And besides, supposing he wouldn't give it up—what then? Why should I lose my money? Let the thief get what's due to him—that's what I say. A swine like that doesn't deserve any pity."

"You're mighty keen on money, aren't you, Ignatov? I dare-

say Proshka hasn't stolen it all. There's still a little left, eh?" said Lavrentich sarcastically.

"P'raps you've been and counted it!"

"No, I haven't. But it's not like a sailor to tell on his mate. It's not our way," Lavrentich said authoritatively. "Isn't that so, lads?" And to Ignatov's discomfort the "lads" agreed that it "wasn't their way."

"And now go and fetch Proshka and question him in front of us here," Lavrentich decreed.

Angry and disappointed though he was, Ignatov had to bow before his shipmates' decision and went off to fetch Proshka.

In the meantime the sailors drew the circle closer.

III

Prokhor Zhitin—or "Proshka" as his shipmates slightingly called him—was a bad egg. A former manor serf and an utter coward (he could only be made to climb a mast—an operation which completely terrified him—under threat of a flogging), he was an inveterate scowbanker and shirker, and a petty thief into the bargain.

He had been a sort of pariah on board right from the start of the voyage. Everybody bullied him. The boatswains and petty officers cursed him and beat him without rhyme or reason, shouting, "Ugh, you dirty loafer." And he never protested against this treatment, but bore it all with the-accustomed submissiveness of a dumb animal.

After he had been detected in one or two petty thefts, hardly anyone on the clipper would even speak to him. He was treated with contempt, and anyone who felt like it could swear at him with impunity, hit him, order him about, and bully him, as if no other treatment of the man was conceivable. Proshka, for his part, had grown so used to being the ship's underdog that he did not expect any other treatment. And he seemed to bear this miserable life without undue suffering, consoling himself by eating a lot and teaching a young piglet to perform various tricks. Ashore he had the additional consolations of drinking and courting the fair sex, of whom he was a great lover. He would spend every kopek he had on women, and it was for their sake, apparently, that he robbed his shipmates, well aware though he was of

the harsh punishment that awaited him if detected. He was permanent master of the heads for lower deck and was never employed on any but the crudest duties for which no special qualification was required. Yet even in these simple duties he often came in for beatings, since he never pulled his weight on a rope with the other men, but only pretended to do so, like a lazy cart-horse.

"Pah, you lazy swine!" the quarter-deck petty officer used to exclaim, vowing to "bash him one" afterwards."

And bash him, to be sure, he did!

IV

Comfortably ensconced under the longboat, Proshka was lying fast asleep, an inane smile on his lips. All of a sudden he was woken up by a violent kick. He was about to crawl away from the intruding foot, when a second kick made him realize that he was wanted for something and would have to leave his cosy retreat. He crawled out from beneath the boat and, standing up, faced Ignatov's angry gaze

with the dull, stupid expression of one expecting a beating.

"Come along," ordered Ignatov, sorely tempted to thrash Proshka there and then.

Proshka followed him meekly, like a guilty dog, taking slow waddling steps like a duck.

He was a man of about 30, with a flabby, clumsy, ill-formed body—a disproportionate trunk on short crooked legs such as tailors have. (Indeed, before coming to the navy he had worked as a tailor in the manor house where he had been a servant.) His bloated, earth-coloured face, with its broad, flat nose and big ears sticking out beneath his cap, was worn and ugly. His little dim, grey eyes peeped out from beneath light thin eyebrows with the expression of meek resignation that one often sees in the eyes of the downtrodden —though at the same time there was a glint of cunning in them. In the whole of his ungainly figure there was not the slightest hint of sailorly bearing, and all his clothes, too, were baggy and slovenly. In a word there was nothing in Proshka's appearance to dispose you towards him.

When the two men joined the other sailors, the buzz of conversation ceased.

The sailors formed a small circle round them and all eyes were fixed on the suspected thief.

Ignatov started the interrogation by hitting Proshka across the face as hard as he could.

The blow was unexpected and Proshka staggered back a little, yet made no attempt to defend himself. His face became even more stupid and frightened-looking, but that was all.

"Thresh the matter out first before you use your fists," Laviontich growled.

"That's just something on account for him, the swine," said Ignatov, and turning to Proshka he said:

"Have you pinched a gold piece from my chest, you skunk?—better own up at once!"

A look of understanding flashed across Proshka's dull stupid face at these words.

He realized the gravity of the accusation, it seemed; and gazing timidly at the circle of serious, hostile faces that surrounded him, he went quite white and shrank, a dull terror distorting his features.

This sudden change strengthened the other sailors' belief that it was he who had stolen the money.

Proshka kept silent, his eyes downcast.

"Where is the money? Out with it! Where have you hidden it?" Ignatov went on.

"I never took your money," Proshka answered in a low voice.

Ignatov flew into a rage:

"Look here," he said, "if you don't give it back to me I'll beat you to death!" (And he spoke so fiercely and seriously that Proshka took a step backwards.)

And from all sides angry voices chimed in:

"Come on, own up to it, you swine!"

"Don't you try to deny it!"

"Give back the money. It'll be better for you!"

Proshka could see that everyone was against him. He raised his head and, doffing his cap, turned to the sailors around him and said in the despairing voice of a man catching at a straw:

"Brothers! As before God himself! On my oath! May I be struck down if I lie!. . . Do with me what you will, but I did not take his money."

These words were not lost on some of the sailors. But Ignatov did not allow their impression time to sink in, and quickly said:

"You're a dirty liar! You leave God out of it. Didn't you deny it that time when you

robbed Kuzmin? And when you stole Leontyev's shirt? Eh? Your oath isn't worth an honest man's spittle, you shameless rascal."

Proshka lowered his eyes again.

"Come on: own up. Tell us where you've put the money, D'you think I didn't see you hanging around the lower deck? What were you doing there when everyone else was sleeping, eh?"

"I was just taking a walk."

"Taking a walk, were you! I warn you, Proshka. Don't drive me to murder. Own up."

But Proshka remained silent.

Then, as a last resort, Ignatov suddenly changed his tactics. Instead of threatening, he began begging Proshka to give the-money back—in a gentle, almost wheedling voice.

"Listen. I won't do you any harm. Just give it back to me and I'll let you be. You'd only spend it on drink, but I have a wife and children to support. Come on, give it back," he almost pleaded.

"Search me, if you don't believe. I haven't taken your money."

"Haven't taken it? Haven't taken it, you swine?" said Ignatov, his face white with fury. "Haven't taken it, you say?"

And with these words he flew at Proshka like a hawk.

White-faced, his shrinking body trembling all over, Proshka closed his eyes and vainly tried to screen his head from the rain of blows that descended upon it.

The sailors watched the ugly scene in frowning silence. And Ignatov, stimulated by his victim's submissiveness, hit harder and harder.

"That's enough. Let him go now," Shutikov exclaimed suddenly.

The soft, gentle voice aroused the other sailors' humane feelings.

Many of them shouted angrily:

"Let him go! Enough!"

"Search him first before you beat him!"

Ignatov stepped aside, trembling with rage. Proshka slipped out of the circle. For several moments all were silent.

"He won't own up, the swine!" Ignatov said when he had had recovered his breath. "You wait till we get ashore," he muttered. "If he hasn't given it back before then, I'll flay him alive—you see if I don't!"

"But maybe it wasn't he who stole the money," Shutikov said quietly.

The same thought seemed to be written on some of the others' grave, frowning faces.

"Not him? Hasn't he done it before? Of course it was him! We all know him for a thief, damn him!" said Ignatov. And he and two of the other sailors went off to search Proshka's chest.

"God, how that man loves his money!" Lavrentich growled, shaking his head. "But you shouldn't steal, though! It's a disgrace to our calling," he added suddenly; and he swore—this time for the sole purpose of dispelling the uncertainty that was plainly written on his rugged old face.

"So you think it wasn't Proshka who took the money?" he asked Shutikov after a short silence. "But who else could it have been?"

Shutikov did not answer, and Lavrentich did not press him further and set to puffing at his little short pipe.

The sailors gradually dispersed.

A few minutes later the forecastle learned that neither on Proshka's person nor in his locker could the missing money be found.

"The rascal's hidden it somewhere," many concluded; and added to themselves that Proshka would be "in for it" now: Ignatov would never forgive him the theft.

V

The gentle tropical night had swiftly descended.

The watch off duty were sleeping on deck, it being too stuffy below. Out here in the tropics, in the regions of the trade wind, watches are quiet and peaceful, and the sailors usually pass the time away chatting and yarning.

Shutikov and Proshka were on watch that night from 12 to 6 a.m.

Shutikov had been telling yarns to a group of sailors, who were sitting round the main mast, and went off to have a smoke. Having smoked a pipeful of tobacco, he walked along the quarter-deck, stepping carefully between the bodies of the sleeping sailors, and found Proshka, who was leaning over the side of the ship in the darkness.

"Is that you, Proshka?" he called quietly.

"Yes," Proshka said with a start.

"Look here," said Shutikov in a quiet, friendly voice. "You know what Ignatov is. He'll half kill you when you go ashore. The fellow's pitiless."

Proshka pricked up his ears. It was a surprise for him to be spoken to in such a tone.

"I don't care. I never took his money," he answered after a short silence.

"No; but he thinks you did. And until he gets his money back, he'll never forgive you. Most of the boys think it was you, too."

"I never took his money, I tell you," Proshka repeated stubbornly.

"I believe you, old chap. I believe you didn't take it, and I was sorry about Ignatov's beating you and threatening to beat you again. I tell you what, Proshka—I'll give you twenty francs, and you give it back to Ignatov. That'll shut him up! And you can pay me back whenever you can—I shan't press you. That'll be the best way. But not a word about this to anyone else, mind," he added.

Proshka was astounded at this proposal. At first he was at a loss for words. If Shutikov could have made out his face in the darkness, he would have seen that it was greatly perplexed and agitated. And

well it might be! Here was someone not only taking pity on Proshka the pariah, but actually offering him money to save him from a thrashing! For a man who had not heard a friendly word in many a month it was overwhelming.

He stood there silent, with downcast eyes, conscious of a strange lump in his throat.

"Here, take the money," said Shutikov, pulling out of his pocket a small rag in which his entire worldly capital was wrapped up.

"But . . . but . . . ah, heavens above!" Proshka mumbled incoherently.

"Come on, don't be silly. Take it. What are you kicking at?"

"Take it? Ah, brother! Bless you for a kind heart," Proshka answered in a voice that shook with emotion. And then, all of a sudden, he said resolutely:

"But I won't take your money, Shutikov. I have some decency after all. I'll give him the money back myself, when the watch is over."

"Then you—— "

"Yes, it was me!" said Proshka in a barely audible whisper. "No one would

have ever found it out. The money's hidden in the gun here."

"Ah, Prokhor, Prokhor!" said Shutikov reproachfully and he shook his head sadly.

"Now let Ignatov beat me all he wants. I don't care if he breaks my jaw! He's welcome! Go on, give Proshka hell, the dirty blighter, he deserves it!" Proshka went on in a sort of frenzy of self-mortification. "I'll bear it all and gladly now. At least I know that somebody has been sorry for me, somebody's believed me . .. somebody's said a kind word to me. I'll never forget this as long as I live!"

"So that's the kind of fellow you are!" said Shutikov kindly, and he leaned back against the gun.

There was silence for a while. Then Shutikov said:

"Look here, old chap, why don't you give up these tricks of yours? Really. Live like decent people do: honestly. Be a regular sailor, all right and proper. It'll do you good, it will. You aren't having much of a time of it as it is, are you? I'm not saying this in reproach, Prokhor—I'm just sorry for you."

Proshka fell under the spell of his words. Never in all his life had anyone spoken so kindly to him. Curses and blows, blows and

curses—those were the only lessons he'd ever received. His heart was filled with a warm feeling of gratitude which he vainly sought words to express; and when Shutikov left him, promising to ask Ignatov to forgive him, he no longer felt quite such a worthless creature as he had before. He stood gazing out at the ocean for a long, long time, every now and again brushing away a tear.

Next morning, when he came off the watch, he took the money back to Ignatov.

The latter, overjoyed, clutched it greedily in his fist, gave Proshka a punch in the jaw and turned to go. But Proshka stood before him, repeating:

"Hit me again! Go on, Semyonich! Hit me as hard as you like!"

Not a little astonished at Proshka's new-found courageous-ness, Ignatov cast a contemptuous look over him and said:

"I would have flayed you alive, you swine, if you hadn't brought the money back. But now that you have, it's not worth soiling my hands on you. Off with you, you skunk. And mind my words: if ever I catch you hanging around my chest again, I'll cripple you for life!"

And pushing Proshka aside, he hurried below to lock up his money.

And there the matter ended.

Thanks to Shutikov's intercession, even Shchukin, the boatswain, who, when he heard about the theft, had sworn to "wring the blighter's neck for him," contented himself with a rather mild "clip in the jaw," as he expressed it.

"Old Semyonich put the wind up Proshka all right," the other sailors said as they scrubbed the decks that morning. "And yet he denied having taken it, the blighter."

VI

After that memorable night Proshka conceived for Shutikov a dog-like devotion. He did not express it openly, of course—feeling, probably, that the friendship of such a pariah as himself would lower Shutikov in the other men's eyes, and he never spoke to him when others were present. But he often used to gaze at him as if at some creature of a higher species beside whom he, Proshka, was the lowest of the low. And he was proud of his protector and took a warm interest in

everything that concerned him. He was lost in admiration, for instance, when he watched Shutikov up aloft, fearlessly making his way along a yard-arm; and he derived endless pleasure from hearing him sing, and altogether thought everything Shutikov did marvellous.

Sometimes during the day, but more often during the night-watch, when he saw Shutikov by himself, he would go up and loiter about near him.

"Anything you want, Prokhor?" Shutikov would ask him in a friendly tone.

"No, nothing, thank you," Proshka would answer. "Where are you going then?"

"Oh, just to my station. I was just taking a walk," Proshka would say, apologizing as it were for disturbing him—and he walked away.

Proshka went out of his way to please Shutikov. One day he would offer to wash his linen for him; another to mend his clothes; and he was very disappointed when—as often happened—his services were declined.

One day he brought along a smart sailor's shirt which he had made and handed it to Shutikov with a rather embarrassed air. "Bravo, Zhitin! Fine work,

old chap!" Shutikov said appreciatively after examining his handiwork, and he made to give it back to him. But Proshka said:

"But it's for you, Yegor Mitrich. Please take it, do me the favour."

At first Shutikov wouldn't accept the gift, but Proshka was so grieved at this, and begged him so earnestly that in the end he did.

Proshka was delighted.

What is more, Proshka did not shirk his duties as much as before, but worked properly like the other sailors. He was not beaten as often as before, but still treated with contempt, and some of the men often amused themselves by teasing and bullying him.

There was one man who was particularly given to bullying him, an arrogant but cowardly young fellow called Ivanov. One day he was amusing himself and a group of shipmates by making sport of Proshka—who made no resistance—and getting more and more tiresome and cruel, when Shutikov happened to pass, and seeing what they were doing, took Proshka's part.

"Now, Ivanov, that won't do. What are you bullying the man for? It isn't fair!"

"Oh, he doesn't mind!" Ivanov answered, laughing. "Come on, Proshka, tell us how you robbed the priest and gave his silver to the girls. Don't be shy! Tell us all about it!" he mocked.

"Let him alone, I tell you," Shutikov said sternly.

Everyone was astonished at Shutikov's standing up so warmly for Proshka the thief, the good-for-nothing.

"Why, what's it to you?" Ivanov snapped.

"Nothing. I don't want you to bully him, that's all. Why don't you find someone of your own size to bully, anyway?"

Deeply touched, but at the same time fearful lest Shutikov's intervention might have unpleasant consequences for his friend. Proshka ventured to raise his voice:

"It's nothing, really . . . Ivanov's only joking."

"If you gave him one in the jaw, maybe he'd stop his 'joking'!"

"Proshka give me one in the jaw!" Ivanov gasped—so utterly incredible did such an idea appear to him. "You just try it, Proshka. Why, I'd knock you into a jelly, you lop-eared ninny!"

"Maybe somebody else would do the same to you!"

"You, for example?"

"Yes, me," said Shutikov, with barely restrained anger, and his usually amiable face became stern and serious.

Ivanov subsided. Not until Shutikov was out of earshot did he continue, pointing at Proshka, and laughing derisively:

"Well, well. . . . So your Shutikov's got himself a friend! Isn't that nice now! And what a friend! Proshka the lavatory-man!"

* * *

After this incident, knowing that Proshka had a protector, they did not tease him so much; and Proshka for his part became more devoted to Shutikov than ever. And it was not very long before he gave proof of what devotion his grateful heart was capable.

VII

The clipper was in the Indian Ocean, on her way to the Sunda Islands.

It was a brilliantly sunny morning, yet there was a nip in the air; the comparative proximity of the South Pole was making

itself felt. A fresh steady breeze was blowing and snow-white feathery clouds were drifting across the sky, forming delicate, fantastic patterns. The clipper was rocking smoothly, borne along by a favourable wind.

It was nearly 10 o'clock. All the crew were on deck. The watch were at their stations and the remainder of the men were all busy at their various duties. Each man had some special task to perform: some were putting the finishing touches to polishing the brass-work, some were cleaning the ship's boat, some were splicing ropes.

Shutikov was in the chains, a hempen safety-belt tied round his waist. He had just taken over from another sailor and was learning to heave the lead. A short distance away from him stood Proshka. The latter was cleaning one of the guns and every now and again stopped to admire Shutikov, who was handling the line with swift, dexterous movements.

All at once a loud cry rang out from the quarter-deck:

"Man overboard!"

And a few seconds later the same sinister cry was heard again:

"Another man overboard!"

For a moment all life seemed to stand still on the clipper. Many of the sailors crossed themselves, horrified.

The officer of the watch, standing on the bridge, saw a man dropping into the sea and another dive in after him. His heart gave a violent start but he did not lose his head. He threw a lifebelt from the bridge and shouted to the men on the poop to throw lifebuoys. In a loud, agitated voice, he gave the order:

"Helm down! Up fore and main courses."

At the first shout of "Man overboard!" all the officers had hurried on deck. The captain and the chief officer were already on the bridge.

"I think he's got hold of one of the lifebuoys!" the captain said, lowering his binoculars for a moment. "Keep them in sight, signal-man!"

"Aye, aye, sir. I can see them."

"Heave to and lower the boat! Hurry up!" the captain ordered in a sharp, excited voice.

But there was no need for him to tell the men to hurry. Realizing that every second was precious, they were working like fiends. In the space of eight minutes the

ship was hove to and the boat, with Midshipman Lyesovoi at the helm, was carefully lowered from the davits.

"Gook luck!" the captain called to them. "Row east-northeast. And don't go too far out."

The men in the sea were already out of sight. In the eight minutes required to bring her to, the ship had drifted at least a mile.

"Who was it?" the captain asked the chief officer.

"It's Shutikov, sir. He was taking soundings and the safety-belt broke."

"And who was the other?"

"Zhitin, sir. He jumped in after him."

"Zhitin? That cowardly weakling?"

"That's just it, sir. I can't make it out myself," the chief officer said.

Meanwhile all eyes were glued on the ship's boat as it slowly receded from the ship, bobbing up and down on the waves. Finally it became invisible to all but those armed with binoculars: there was nothing to be seen but the infinite, surging ocean.

A gloomy silence reigned in the ship. Now and again the sailors would exchange a few words in low voices, but that was the only sound. The captain kept his eyes

riveted to his binoculars. The chief navigating officer and the two signal-men were looking through spyglasses.

A long half hour passed in this way.

"The boat's coming back!" one of the signal-men reported.

Once again all eyes were fixed on the sea.

"He must have picked them up," the chief officer said quietly.

"What makes you think so?" asked the captain.

"Lyesovoi wouldn't come back so soon otherwise."

"Let's hope you're right!"

The ship's boat was slowly approaching. It looked a tiny shell in the distance. At every moment it seemed as if one of the huge waves would engulf it. But it reappeared again on the crest of the succeeding wave and continued on its way.

"Bravo, Lyesovoi! He's steering splendidly," exclaimed the captain, his eyes fixed on the boat.

The boat drew nearer and nearer.

"They've both been picked up," the signaller shouted happily-

A sigh of relief went up. Many of the sailors crossed themselves. The ship came

to life again as it were and conversation was resumed.

"They've had a lucky escape," said the captain, and a broad, happy smile lit up his grave face.

The chief officer smiled back at him.

"Who would believe it of Zhitin! We always thought him a coward!" the captain continued.

"It's incredible! An idler like that—and yet he jumps overboard to save a comrade. Shutikov took him under his wing," the chief officer explained.

Everyone was marvelling at Proshka's feat. He was the hero of the moment.

Ten minutes later the boat reached the ship and was safely hoisted aboard.

Hot, wet and sweating, the boat's crew made their way to the forecastle, panting with exhaustion. Shutikov and Proshka stood shaking water off themselves like ducks, both white-faced, excited and happy-looking.

Everyone gazed with respect at Proshka, standing in front of the captain.

"Bravo, Zhitin!" said the captain, marvelling at the sight of this awkward, slovenly-looking sailor who had just risked his life to save a comrade.

And Proshka was so shy he scarcely knew which foot to stand on.

"Well, go and get changed quickly and then have a glass of vodka on me. For your courage you'll be recommended for a medal, and I shall give you a money reward, too."

Bashful and confused, Proshka forgot even to say "thank you, sir." Smiling awkwardly he turned round and went below to change with his usual duck-like waddle.

"Stand on!" ordered the captain as he climbed up the bridge.

The officer of the watch gave the command, his voice now calm and cheerful. Soon the sails were trimmed and the ship stood on her course, lightly bobbing from one wave to another, and the morning's work was resumed.

"Well, you are a strange fellow, devil take you!" Lavrentich said to Proshka as, clad in dry clothes and warmed by a glass of vodka, he followed Shutikov up on deck. "To think that a tailor could have the guts to do such a thing," he went on, patting him on the back.

"If it hadn't been for Prokhor, I wouldn't be alive now. When I fell in and came up, I

said to myself: 'It's all up with you, old chap, say your prayers,' " Shutikov told them. " 'I shan't be able to hold out for long,' I said to myself. . . . And then suddenly I heard Prokhor shouting to me. He'd swum up with a lifebelt and a lifebuoy for me. Was I pleased to see him! So we hung on together till the boat came and picked us up."

"Were you scared?" the sailors asked.

"You bet I was!" answered Shutikov, smiling good-naturedly.

"Whatever made you do it?" the boatswain, who had just come up, asked Proshka kindly.

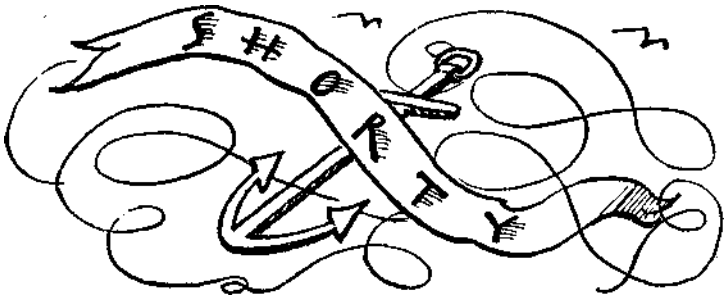
Proshka smiled foolishly and after a moment's silence replied:

"I don't know, Matvei Nilich . . . I just saw him . . . Shutikov, 1 mean . . . fall in . . . and so I jumped in after him without thinking."

"Well done, Prokhor! Well done! That's what I call a real friend. Here, take a puff," said old Lavrentich, handing Proshka his short pipe as a special mark of favour and adding one or two racy swear-words in the gentlest tone of voice of which he was capable.

From that day Zhitin ceased to be the browbeaten "Proshka" and became known by his real name of Prokhor.

SHORTY



I

EARLY one lustrous tropical morning in the eighteen sixties in the roadstead at Singapore, where a squadron of the Russian Pacific Fleet was, lying at anchor, the new chief officer, Baron von der Bering, a lean, lanky, fair-haired man of about thirty-five, with an uncommonly serious expression on his face, was making his first round of inspection of the corvette *Moguchy*, accompanied by Gordeyev, the

chief boatswain, and was carrying out a most searching and careful examination of the ship. The Baron, who. had just been transferred, at the admiral's order, from the clipper Golub, had only stepped aboard the *Moguchy* the previous evening and was now making himself acquainted with his new ship.

Keen as the pedantic "new broom" of a chief officer was to find fault, he could not pick on anything. The *Moguchy*, which had been on an outward journey for the last two years, was in excellent trim and shone from stem to stern with dazzling cleanliness. Not for nothing had her previous chief officer—the amiable Stepan Stepanovich, a favourite with officers and ratings alike, who had now been appointed to command one of the clippers—put his whole genial, simple soul into keeping the *Moguchy* what he called "clean as a new penny," an object of envy to any sailor who could appreciate a good piece of ship work when he saw it.

And in truth the *Moguchy* was admired at every port she visited.

Walking along the lower deck at a slow, shambling gait, Baron Bering suddenly stopped and, raising his hand, pointed at

something with his long white index finger on which was shining a ring with the seal of the ancient house of the Courland Barons von der Bering. The object at which he was pointing was a big, red, hairy dog lying fast asleep in a comfortable shady corner of the sailors' quarters, its ugly, not at all thoroughbred-looking muzzle stretched out on the floor.

"What is that?" the Baron demanded after a few moments' solemn silence.

"A dog, sir," the boatswain answered promptly, thinking the Baron hadn't been able to see the dog in the half light of the orlop and had taken it for something else.

"Fool!" said the Baron in quiet icy tones. "I can see it's a dog, not a deck swab. What I want to know is: what is it doing here? A dog on a warship—it's unheard of! Whose dog is it?"

"The ship's, sir."

"Boatswain. . . . What is your name?"

"Gordeyev, sir."

"Boatswain Gordeyev. Express yourself more clearly; I do not understand you. What do you mean by 'ship's dog'?" The Baron went on in the same slow, quiet, grating voice, uttering each syllable with exaggerated precision in the way Russian

Germans do, and keeping his big, clear, cold blue eyes fixed on the other's face.

The elderly boatswain, who, had never had any difficulty in making himself understood before (except perhaps on certain occasions when he had come back dead drunk from shore leave), stared in perplexity at the Baron's long, impassive face with its mutton chop reddish whiskers and white cheeks faintly suffused with pink, and evidently nonplussed by this importunate questioning, merely blinked his grey eyes helplessly instead of replying.

"Who does this ship's dog belong to, then?"

"To the crew . . . the ratings, sir," the boatswain explained with a gloomy air, thinking angrily: "As if you don't understand, Spindle-Shanks?"

But it seemed that "Spindle-Shanks" couldn't understand, for he said:

"Nonsense. It must have an owner. Every dog has."

"Not this one, sir. He's a stray."

"A what?" queried the Baron. Evidently the word was unknown to him.

"A stray dog, sir. Shorty followed one of our men aboard when we were rigging the corvette at Kronstadt, and he's been with

us ever since. We called him Shorty because of his tail, sir," the boatswain added by way of explanation.

"Dogs are not allowed on a warship. They only make a mess on the deck."

"With your leave, sir, Shorty's an intelligent dog and well-behaved. We've had no trouble with him that way at all!" the boatswain said in Shorty's defence. "Stepan Stepanich, our last chief officer, said we might keep him, seeing that he's a good dog, one can say, and the crew are very fond of him."

"You fellows have been given too much rein, I see, and it's spoilt you. I am going to tighten things up here—do you understand?" said the Baron sternly, annoyed at what seemed to him the familiarity of the boatswain's explanations and at the fact that he did not seem to be in any great awe of him.

"Yes, sir."

The Baron paused for a moment with knitted brows, deliberating what should be Shorty's fate. And the boatswain, who was rather fond of the dog, anxiously awaited his decision.

Finally the chief officer said:

"If I ever catch it making a mess on deck, I'll have it thrown overboard. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"And remember this: I am not in the habit of repeating my orders," the Baron added impressively in the same level, grating, monotonous voice.

Boatswain Gordeyev, who'd served under all kinds of officers during his life at sea and was a good judge of character, had already, even before this warning, come to the conclusion that "Spindle-Shanks," for all his quiet, calm way of speaking, would be a proper "pest," a very different kettle of fish in fact from the popular Stepan Stepanich.

Hearing his name spoken several times, Shorty opened his eyes, stretched, lazily rose to his feet, and, leaving his dark cubby-hole, made a few steps towards the light. And at the sight of a stranger in officer's uniform he wagged his stump of a tail respectfully, like an intelligent dog who understood naval discipline.

"Ugh! what a hideous creature!" said the Baron, casting a disdainful look at the big, ugly, clumsy-looking mongrel with its rough, red, matted hair, tattered, sharp-

pointed ears, and big, wide muzzle—the latter spotted with bald patches as if moth-eaten.

The one redeeming feature in Shorty's otherwise uncouth appearance were his eyes, which had an unusually good-natured, intelligent expression in them. But the Baron probably did not notice these eyes, which examined him so curiously.

"Keep that beastly dog out of my sight!"

And with these words he turned on his heel and went back to the upper deck, followed by the frowning and dejected-looking boatswain.

Tucking his little stump of a tail (the product of a cruel joke a Kronstadt cook had played on him) between his legs, Shorty crept back to his dark cubby-hole, limping a little on one forefoot, which had been broken a long time ago, and conscious, no doubt, that he had not had the good fortune to make a favourable impression on this lanky officer with the red side whiskers and the ugly glint in the eyes—a glint that seemed to bode no good to him.

One of the ratings, who had overheard the chief officer's words, came up and

stroked the corvette's pet, and Shorty licked his rough hand gratefully.

II

Weighed down by that sense of acute depression which a simple Russian usually feels when he is lectured to and nagged by his superiors, the poor boatswain had to stand in the Baron's-cabin for a quarter of an hour or more after this and listen, fidgeting impatiently with his cap, while the latter gave long, involved, monotonous directions as to how the corvette was to be run in future, what he would demand of the boatswains and petty officers, what sort of conduct was required From the ratings, what the Baron understood by the words "proper discipline," and what severe punishments he would inflict for drunkenness ashore.

Released at length with a parting, "Remember what I have told you and pass it on to the others," the boatswain heaved a sigh of relief and, as red in the face as if he'd just come out of a bath, hurried to the forecastle to get a smoke.

But no sooner had he reached it than he was surrounded by all the other members of the forecastle aristocracy: the surgeon's assistant, the steward, the mate, the engineman, the two clerks and several petty officers.

"Well, Akim Zakharich, what's the new Number One like? What do you make of him?" they all asked.

But the boatswain, instead of replying, simply made a gesture of despair with his red, hairy, knotty hand and spat vehemently into the tub.

And this gesture of his, the violent way in which he spat, the exasperated expression on his tanned brick-red face, with its greyish-black side whiskers and ruddy, potato-like nose, and his scowling, close-knit brows all seemed to say: "The least said about him the better."

"Bad-tempered, is he?" one of the others asked.

The boatswain did not reply at first. He inhaled deeply once or twice, spat a second time, and then, casting a significant look round his audience—who were burning to hear what such a clever and authoritative man as the boatswain had to tell them—finally burst out (lowering his

stentorian voice a little, however—a voice which had earned itself the nickname of "the fog-horn"):

"He's a holy terror and no mistake!"

This description, rendered with such vehemence and conviction, made a powerful impression on the others. And with good reason. For the last two years they had been serving under a chief officer who, as the ratings themselves said, had been a "decent" fellow, who cared for his crew, didn't wear them out with ship duties and drilling, used his fists rarely (and if he did, did it in anger, not cold-bloodedly) and had been lenient with sailors' weakness for getting drunk on shore leave. After this the prospect of having a "holy terror" to command them was a very unattractive one. No wonder then that all their faces became grave and thoughtful all of a sudden.

For a few moments a tense silence reigned.

"In what sense is he a 'holy terror'?" asked the young curly-headed surgeon's assistant, who, by reason of his duties, ran less risk of coming into conflict with the chief officer. Provided he stuck to his surgeon and his sick-bay, he was all right!

"In every sense, lad! A champion nagger —that's what he is! He talks your head off, the German blighter! You should have heard him go for me in his cabin just now. Stared at me with those great fish eyes of his and blah-blah-blahed at me as if he'd never stop," said the boatswain, and he imitated the Baron's voice: " 'I'm going to tighten things up here,' he says. 'Under me,' he says, 'this ship's going to be run differently. I,' he says, 'shall punish any shore leave drunkenness severely.' Droned on and on like that. . . . Enough to make you sick."

"The petty officer that brought him down on the cutter yesterday from the Golub had not much good to say of him either. He said he was a cross-grained obstinate sort of man, who nagged everyone to death on the clipper," said one of the petty officers. "All aboard the Golub are thankful they've got rid of him, he's such a nuisance, they said. He doesn't use his fists, though, or go in for floggings, they said—just punishes you in ways of his own—makes you stand on the shrouds barefooted or sit it out on a yard-arm. They say he's always finding fault and that he thinks a lot of himself, this . . . what-'s-his-name."

"Bernikov, isn't it?" said the boatswain, Russianizing the German name. "One of those German barons. . . . But I don't see why he should think such a lot of himself," he added authoritatively, "because he's nothing at all really." "What makes you say that?"

"Because he hasn't much sense in him. You can tell that from the way he talks. And he's slow on the uptake. Just now he couldn't understand what I meant when I said that Shorty belonged to the corvette. 'What do you mean?' he says to me. 'It must have an owner,' he says."

"How did you come to be speaking about Shorty?" one of the men asked.

"Well, he didn't like the look of Shorty, and so do you know what? He says dogs aren't allowed on warships. And he's threatened to have him thrown overboard if he makes a mess on the deck. And we've got to keep him out of his sight, he says."

"Why, what is it to him? Shorty's not in his way, is he?"

"Everything's in his way, damn him. He can't even leave a poor dumb animal alone. Yes, boys, God has sent us a real pest this time and no mistake! Things on board are going to be different. We shan't

half wish we still had Stepan Stepanich here, God bless him!" said the boatswain, and he knocked out his pipe and put it back in his pocket.

"I reckon our captain will keep him within bounds," said the young surgeon's assistant. "He won't let him do too much mischief. Not he! These are different times. They're giving the peasants freedom now and everyone will have a right to law and justice."

"The captain can't be everywhere. The thing is that the chief officer is our direct boss," replied the boatswain.

"If necessary, one of us could go and complain to the captain," said the surgeon's assistant, waxing bold.

"Smart, aren't you! Can you imagine a captain going against one of his brother officers and disgracing him just on account of some petty officer or other? That's the point. No, my dear chap, it's no use just one of us making a complaint. That only makes your chiefs wild and gets you nowhere—it's just asking for trouble. In the old days we had another method," added the boatswain, a stern upholder of the old traditions of lower deck law, as you might say.

"What was that, Akim Zakharich?"

"Well, if there was any hazing done, say, and we sailors just couldn't stand it any more, being made desperate-like, we'd fall into line the regular way, and make a formal complaint to the captain through the boatswains."

"And did it help?"

"That depended on the captain. Some captains, instead of going into the matter, would have half the crew flogged. But others would give you a fair hearing and fair play. I remember once at review—it was my first year in the navy—we made a formal complaint to Admiral Chaplygin about Commander Zanozov—a real brute he was!—and instead of an investigation we all got thrashed for it. You heard nothing but moans and groans the whole day long—I got a hundred lashes that time—that's all that complaint came to. But another time we complained about our chief officer to Captain Chulkov—him that's an admiral now—and things turned out quite differently. He scowled terribly while he was listening to our complaint, but he promised to investigate it properly."

"And did he?"

"Yes, he did. A week later that chief officer was drafted out of the ship 'for reasons of health'—and we were able to breathe freely again. And we didn't get into trouble at all that time. Yes, that's what we used to do, boys. We were taking our chance, of course, and the odds were one to a hundred."

"Well, our captain wouldn't let his crew be ill-treated!"

"The captain's our only hope. But the captain can't know all that goes on aboard. This lanky German will nag us all to death."

The conversation about the new chief officer continued for some time. In the end it was decided to await events. Perhaps, fearing the captain, he would not dare to make changes in the ship's routine that Stepan Stepanich had instituted. This thought set their minds at ease somewhat. And then the young clerk, a tremendous dandy who wore an amethyst ring on his little finger, asked:

"And what about shore leave, Akim Zakharich? Is he going to let us have a look at Singapore?"

"He didn't say anything about that."

"You ought to speak to him about it, Akim Zakharich."

"I will."

"Everyone wants to stretch his legs ashore, I reckon. And they say this Singapore's a fine place, what with the scenery and good restaurants. And I've heard say there are some good shops there, too. Do speak to him about it, Akim Zakharich. We don't know how long we are going to stay here and may miss our chance of seeing the place."

Just at this moment the chief officer's young servant, Oshurkov, came rushing into the forecastle and said to the boatswain:

"Akim Zakharich! The chief officer wants you."

"What does he want now?"

"I couldn't say. He's sitting in his cabin going through some papers."

"Going to start his nagging again, is he? What a—— " And swearing lustily, he hurried off to answer the chief officer's summons.

"Are you going to stay on as servant to the new Number One?" the other sailors asked Oshurkov.

"Got to. I'll just have to grin and bear it. By the looks of it God's sent me a real terror in Stepan Stepanich's place. He's

already been going on at me about what he calls 'order.' I've got to do everything smoothly, like a machine, he says."

III

The new chief officer's dislike for Shorty and his threat to have the dog thrown overboard brought a dull murmur of resentment from the sailors. They were all astonished at what seemed such senseless cruelty, at the very idea of depriving the crew of the beloved pet which had done so much to relieve the monotony and the weariness of their life at sea, and who was furthermore such a gentle, grateful animal, repaying his benefactors for their kindness by a devotion to them that was all the more sincere after the hard vagrant life he had led for some years on the streets of Kronstadt.

A sagacious, intelligent dog, who quickly picked up the things the sailors taught him, ugly, comical-looking, Shorty delighted the crew by the tricks he performed and amazed everyone by his remarkable quickness of understanding. And what pleasure and amusement he did provide

for these simple, unexacting sailors, enabling them to forget, for the moment at least, the hardness of their life at sea on these long transoceanic voyages, and their long absences from home.

He would walk about on his hind legs, the most comically serious expression on his intelligent face; he would fetch and carry for them; he would climb aloft and stay up in the shrouds until someone shouted, "Down!" to him; he would bare his teeth and growl if they said "Want to be flogged, Shorty?" and grin and wag his stump of a tail if they said: "Want to go ashore?" When the whistle sounded, followed by the boatswain's voice shouting, "Clear lower deck!" he would scamper up on deck together with the watch, no matter what the weather, and remain with them on the forecastle until the signal to go below was sounded; and when there wasia gale blowing, he was nearly always on deck, entertaining the sailors during their onerous duties. When the whistle for the vodka-distribution sounded, he accompanied the sailors to this function too; and at dinner-time he would walk round the sailors' mess on his hind legs,

thanking them for the generous titbits they threw him by cheerful little barks.

After dinner, with the watch below, Shorty always used to go to sleep at the feet of Kochnev, a dour-faced elderly forecastle man and inveterate boozer, for whom the dog seemed to have a touching and devoted affection. He was nearly always to be found at his side and looked tremendously pleased if Kochnev stroked or patted him. He always accompanied him during the night watches, and when it was Kochnev's turn to take the lookout in the bows, often performed his friend's duties for him. He would sit there conscientiously, soaked by the rain and buffeted by the wind, and gaze out into the darkness of the night, his tattered ears cocked and alert, enabling old Kochnev, wrapped in his tarpaulin and warmed by the heat of the dog's body to nod off to sleep. If he saw the lights of a passing ship—or if the silhouette of a merchantman, negligently showing none, suddenly loomed up—he would give a loud bark and wake the sleeping watchman. Ashore, too, Shorty would always accompany Kochnev. He would go with him to the nearest tavern, leave him for an hour to pay a visit to the local canine

community, then come back, sometimes rather mauled, to his friend and stay with him inseparably. He would listen attentively and sympathetically to the sailor's drunken monologues, which were mostly of a melancholy nature, expressing his interest by wagging his stump or by an affectionate whine; and when Kochnev collapsed in a drunken heap on his way back to the corvette, Shorty would keep guard over him till his shipmates came along and picked him up. In a word, he showed a real devotion to the man who had given him, a poor homeless stray, ever in danger of the dog-catcher's rope, a peaceful refuge and plenty to eat aboard the corvette and a happy life among men who, from the first day he had appeared on board, had shown him a kindness and gentleness that he had not known since puppyhood.

The morose, unsociable old Kochnev, too, for his part, became greatly attached to this foundling of his who had revealed such brilliant abilities (not to mention his high moral qualities), and when he was drunk he would make Shorty the sole recipient of his confidences. He told him how he had been "packed off" into the

navy through the vile machinations of some scoundrel, told him about his wife who lived "like a real lady," and about his daughter who was so fine she wouldn't have anything to do with him. And Shorty seemed to understand that they were melancholy things this sombre-faced sailor was telling him as he tossed down gin after gin in some foreign tavern.

Kochnev's meeting with Shorty had come about quite by accident. It had happened in Kronstadt one cold, wet, Sunday afternoon, two or three days before the *Moguchy* was due to sail on a long foreign cruise. Properly "soused," with his legs doing fanciful steps, Kochnev was making his way back to the corvette from a visit to a tavern when, passing through some back street, he noticed a dog cowering against a drain-pipe and shivering with cold. The forlorn appearance of the animal, his rain-drenched hair, sharply protruding ribs and extreme shabbiness—all of which showed that he was a homeless vagabond —aroused the drunken sailor's compassion.

"Who d'you b'long to, ol' chap? Got no home, eh?" he said thickly, stopping in front of the dog.

The dog looked at the drunk suspiciously with his intelligent eyes, as if debating with himself whether to make a dash 'for it, or wait and see if the man moved on. But a few more words uttered in a kindly tone seemed to reassure him as to the man's intentions and he whimpered plantively. And when the sailor came nearer and stroked his head, the dog licked his hand, touched by his kindness, it seemed, and whimpered still louder.

Kochnev started rummaging in his pockets. The dog watched him eagerly.

"You must be hungry, poor devil!" said the sailor. "Well, let me see. . . . Yes, you're in luck—here's something," he added, fishing a copper coin out of his trouser pocket.

He went into a small shop and a few moments later threw the dog some bread and bits of tripe which he had bought with the two kopeks left over from his carousing.

The dog pounced on the food, gobbled it all up in a few seconds and then looked up at the sailor again expectantly.

"Well, come along to the corvette then, if you're so hungry. They'll give you enough to eat there. They're good lads, the sailors

are. You needn't be frightened of them. And you can spend the night aboard. Why stay out in the rain ? Come along, doggie!"

He whistled and the dog followed him to the ship. It went up the gang-plank after him and followed him to the crowded fore-castle, looking a bit scared and sort of shamefaced at the sorry sight it presented.

"I've brought a poor stray along, boys!" said Kochnev, pointing to the dog.

The animal's miserable appearance aroused the sailors' pity. They stroked him and patted him and took him below to give him some food.

And before long, filled to repletion, he lay asleep near the galley, waking with a start every now and then, scarcely able to believe his good fortune.

Next morning the dog was awakened by the cleaning of the upper deck, and started up in alarm. But Kochnev soon calmed his worst fears by bringing him a bowl full of the thin skilly the sailors had for breakfast.

A little later, when the cleaning was finished, he took the dog on deck with him and suggested to the other sailors that they keep him aboard.

"Let him sail with us," he said.

His suggestion was welcomed by the others. They asked the boatswain to get the chief officer's permission and when it was given, the question arose as to what name they should give the dog.

All eyes were turned to the ugly mongrel which answered their friendly glances by wagging his stump of a tail and gratefully licking the hands of the sailors who patted him.

"With a tail like that the only name for him is 'Shorty'," somebody said.

This name pleased the rest. So from that instant "Shorty" became a member of the *Moguchy*'s crew.

Shorty's first instructor was Kochnev, who revealed most brilliant pedagogic talents. In less than a week the dog learned to respect the sanctity of the white spotless deck and to behave as a good dog should behave. And the first spell of rough weather in the Baltic revealed in him excellent seamanlike qualities too. He was not at all seasick, but ate just as heartily as usual and didn't seem in the least afraid of the huge seas that pounded the corvette's sides. Very soon gentle, intelligent Shorty was a universal favourite on board,

delighting the sailors with all the things he could do.

And now somebody was threatening to throw this wonderful dog of theirs overboard.

No one was more horrified, of course, by the new chief officer's threat than Kochnev himself. And he decided to do everything he could to prevent "that lanky devil" from ever encountering the dog. So that very same day, when the whistle for vodka sounded and Shorty came frisking up on deck as usual, Kochnev led him back and, pointing to a place in the darkest corner of the orlop, said: "You must stay quietly here, Shorty, or else there'll be trouble. I'll bring you your dinner here."

IV

A month went by, during which time the sailors got to know their new chief officer quite well, and to detest him heartily. True, he had not had anyone flogged yet and he didn't hit anyone or show any predilection for acts of physical cruelty. But they detested him none the less for his petty, cavilling ways, for "nagging a fellow to

death," if guilty of any offence, and then punishing him in the nastiest way possible —by depriving him of shore leave, the one pleasure a sailor had on these long cruises. Other punishments he inflicted were to send men aloft to the mast-top or to sit on a yard-arm. And, what the sailors resented most of all, he sometimes deprived them of their cherished vodka ration.

The Baron was hated and feared for these punishments of his and for the heartless pedantry with which he insisted on every item of ship's routine being carried out to the letter. All felt as though they were being weighed down by a relentless, soulless machine; and, worst of all, they could feel that the Baron really-despised them all and regarded ratings as just so much labour power and nothing else. Never a joke, never a kind word did they hear from him. Always that same cool, level, grating voice in which a sensitive ear could detect a note of haughty contempt. Always that same harsh gleam in his impassive blue eyes.

The Baron did not inspire respect as a seaman either. In the forecastle (that sailors' club-room where every officer's character is deftly picked to pieces) it was

decided that he was very far from being the "eagle" Stepan Stepanich had been, and was in fact a chicken-hearted fellow who had shown signs of cowardice when the corvette was caught in a storm after leaving Singapore. The older sailors said that his seamanship was nothing much to boast of for all that he poked his nose in everywhere. He hadn't much brains in that long noddle of his either—he was just stubborn, that was all. Altogether the men couldn't stick the Baron at any price. When they spoke of him they always called him "Nagging Nick," and avoided his "tellings-off" like the plague.

At the beginning the Baron tried to make some changes in the ship's routine. Previously the daily drill had been quite a short function, but the Baron began extending it to as much as three hours—much to the distress of the sailors who got tired enough as it was from their six-hour watches every day. But the captain soon curbed the new chief officer's zeal.

And the manner in which he did it was related to the forecastle by Yegorka, the captain's sprightly young servant.

"He sent for Nagging Nick, boys, and says to him: 'Karla Fernandich,' he says,

'you mustn't make these changes and wear the men out with unnecessary drills. Leave things as they were,' he says."

"And what did Nagging Nick say to that?"

"Went as red as a boiled lobster, the devil did. 'Yes, sir,' he says, 'I only thought it would be for the good of the service,' he says. 'Begging your pardon, Baron,' the captain says, 'but I,' he says, 'know without your help what is good for the service. It's for the good of the service that the men should not be hazed. They've got enough to do as it is, what with the watches and things,' he says, 'and our boys,' he says, 'are jolly good workers and a fine lot of fellows. So be good enough,' he says, 'not to worry your head on that score. And that,' he says, 'is about all I have to say to you.' So Nagging Nick went off with a flea in his ear," Yegorka told the delighted forecastle.

Altogether, with his new ways and his new views about discipline, Baron von der Bering didn't fit in at all on the *Moguchy*. The wardroom disliked him too, particularly the younger officers, who had imbibed the new liberal ideas of the sixties and were eager to put them into practice by a more humane relationship with the lower deck. The Baron's feudalistic and conservative

views had something antiquated and obsolete about them. Perfectly honest in his convictions, parading what he called his "sacred principles," the Baron, with his proud, pompous manner and his maddening punctuality, irritated the officers enormously; and they regarded him as a dull, stupid pedant who thought himself infallible and looked down upon everyone else with baronial disdain. Nor did the Baron find favour with those "pariahs" of the fleet—the navigating officer, the chief gunner and the chief engineer. Always touchy and suspicious, they were very much aware of the haughty arrogance and sense of superiority that lay behind the baron's exquisitely polite manner.

The captain did not take to the new chief officer either. He did not feel at all grateful to the Admiral for "planting this German sausage on him," and did not realize, of course, that the crafty Admiral had sent the baron to the *Moguchy* precisely because he had felt sure that the *Moguchy*'s captain would quickly get rid of him, thus providing the Admiral with an excuse to wash his hands of the matter

and send the unpopular officer back to Russia.

Hardly anyone in the wardroom ever spoke to the Baron, except on official matters. He was excluded, as it were, from the friendly confraternity of the *Moguchy*'s officers. The young midshipmen could not resist the pleasure of "baiting" the chief officer now and then by fulminating in his hearing against the serf-owners and conservatives who did not understand the significance of the great reforms, and by singing Stepan Stepanich's praises. "How good it was to serve with him!" they would say. "An experienced, capable officer and an excellent comrade as well! How the men loved him! And how well he understood them! And how hard they used to work for him!"

"Even Shorty loved him!" exclaimed a fair, curly-haired midshipman named Koshutich, who was particularly fond of baiting "that blockhead of a German aristocrat." "We never seem to see Shorty these days, by the way. He must be hiding himself, poor doggie. I wonder why," he added purposely, knowing all about the chief officer's threat.

Beyond puffing himself up like an angry turkey, the Baron did not seem to pay any attention to these jibes, and carried on as before with the stupid obstinacy of the pedant, as if unaware of his unpopularity.

During that month, the new chief officer had in fact never once set eyes on Shorty again, though the dog had seen him once from a distance, on which occasion Kochnev had pointed to him and said, "Beware of him," in such a terrifying voice that the dog promptly sat down on his haunches. But Shorty's former free and easy existence was no more. In the mornings, when the chief officer made his usual round, he had to go into hiding in some dark corner of the hold or the stokehold and Kochnev went to great pains to teach him to sit there without making any sound. Not even when "all hands' " work was in progress was he allowed on deck. Thanks to Kochnev's lessons, it was sufficient to say, "Nagging Nick is coming," for the dog to put his tail_ between his legs and scuttle down to some secret hiding-place, from which he would only emerge when one of the sailors gave a reassuring whistle through the hatches.

The only time the sailors would take Shorty on deck with them was when the Baron was eating or sleeping. At these times he would entertain them as before with his amusing tricks. "Don't be afraid, Shorty," they would say to him, "Nagging Nick's not here." And to protect their pet while he was performing in the forecastle, they posted sentries to warn them of "Nagging Nick's" approach. Only at night-time, on dark, moonless tropical nights especially, was Shorty, who had had all the sleep he wanted during the day, allowed to roam the forecastle and play with the sailors. But he no longer shared Kochnev's look-out duties, or signalled the lights of passing ships by barking. Kochnev kept his watch alone now, fearing to subject his pet to the fury of "Nagging Nick," whom the morose sailor seemed to hate more heartily than anyone else.

All these precautions notwithstanding, it wasn't very long before a storm broke out over poor Shorty's head.

V

It was a hot, blazing day in the China Sea. There was not a cloud in the blue sky and the sea was dead calm. The wind had dropped since dawn, the sails hung limp, and the captain ordered the engine room to get up steam. Soon the steam was hissing and the *Moguchy*, all sails furled, was proceeding at full speed on her way to Nagasaki.

The chief officer, who was particularly anxious that the *Moguchy* should arrive at Nagasaki (where the Admiral had ordered a "meeting") spick and span, was making his third round of inspection of the corvette, finding fault with all sorts of things and making himself a perfect nuisance. Obviously he was in a bad humour, despite the fact that everything was as trim as could be and the ship was sparkling and glittering in the dazzling rays of the burning sun. The Baron had just been having more words with the captain, and was feeling rather aggrieved. "That weak-willed man," as he contemptuously called the captain, had been turning down all the various suggestions he had made for what he felt were surely "the interests of the service," and relations between the two were growing steadily cooler. In addition,

those young midshipmen had been making digs at him every now and again, doing it in such a way that he couldn't pull them up for it. Seething with anger, the Baron haughtily reflected how hard it was for a proper officer like himself to have to serve with these stupid Russian "democrats" who had no conception of what real discipline was and undermined the prestige of authority.

Preoccupied with these thoughts, the Baron went down to the mess deck and was approaching the crew's quarters, when suddenly Shorty darted past him and raced to the upper deck.

"That beastly dog again!" the Baron said to himself, somewhat startled by Shorty's sudden appearance.

And all of a sudden his eyes became fixed on a particular section of the deck just below the forehatch, and an expression of disgust appeared on his face.

"Send for the boatswain!" he shouted.

Presently, Boatswain Gordeyev appeared.

"What is that?" the Baron demanded slowly and grimly, pointing to something on the deck.

The boatswain, following the direction of his long white beringed finger, looked embarrassed.

"What is it, I ask you?"

"Begging your pardon, sir, but it's—— "

And the boatswain gloomily gave it a name.

The Baron paused for a moment. Then he said:

"You remember what I told you?"

"Yes, sir," said the boatswain, more gloomy than ever.

"Within five minutes that mangy cur is to be thrown overboard."

"I beg leave to report, sir, that the dog's unwell," said the boatswain in a tone of respectful entreaty. "The feldsher examined him this morning and said it was stomach trouble, but that he'd soon be right again. He'd never have done such a thing if he'd not been ill, sir. Please, sir, do forgive him," he begged, his voice quivering with emotion.

"Gordeyev! I am not in the habit of repeating my orders. You don't expect me to believe whatever nonsense you tell me. In five minutes' time you will report to me that my order has been carried out. And have the deck scrubbed down!" he added.

With these words he turned on his heel and went.

"Ugh, you mean beast!" the boatswain whispered fiercely.

He went up on deck and finding Kochnev, who was waiting for Shorty to take him below, said agitatedly:

"We're in for it, old chap. 'Nagging Nick' has just caught Shorty fouling the deck, and—— "

And instead of finishing the sentence, he just shook his head in sorrowful fashion.

Kochnev understood what this meant. His face changed quickly and the muscles on it quivered. For a few seconds he stood motionless, in an attitude of utter despair.

"The poor dog—what a shame!" sighed the boatswain. "But what can one do with a scoundrel like that?"

"Zakharich! Zakharich!" said the other in a piteous broken voice. "Shorty's ill. What can you expect if the dog's ill? He must have had it bad to do such a thing. He's an intelligent dog. He understands. He's never done such a thing before. He's been going to the 'place' all day long. Zakharich! Please. . . I beg you . . . go and tell that devil that the dog's ill."

"D'you think I haven't told him already? Didn't I plead for Shorty! But he wouldn't take the slightest notice. The dog is to be thrown overboard,' he said, 'within five minutes!' "

"Zakharich! . . . Please. . . . Go and ask him again. . . . The dog is ill, tell him."

"I'll try. But I doubt if 'twill be any use. The brute!" said the boatswain, and he went back to the chief officer.

Shorty, meanwhile, whom illness had deprived of his usual playful spirits, and who looked gaunt and dull-eyed, came up to Kochnev with a sort of shamefaced, conscience-stricken air, and licked his hand. Kochnev stroked the dog with a burst of affection and his sombre face was lit up by an unwonted gentleness.

A minute later the boatswain returned. From the gloomy expression on his face it was obvious that his mission had not been successful.

"He threatened to have me degraded!" he growled angrily.

"Brothers!" said Kochnev, turning to the sailors in the forecastle. "Have you heard what that scoundrel wants to do? What right has he to drown our ship's dog? Who gave him the power?"

His sullen face was fired with excitement. His eyes flashed angrily.

An angry murmur went up from the sailors. Voices exclaimed:

"There's no limit to his bullying ways, the accursed Nagger!"

"He has no right to do such a thing—the beast!"

"Why should a poor helpless animal be drowned?"

"Let's save him, brothers! Let's go to the captain. He's a decent man and he'll see fair play done! He won't allow it!" shouted Kochnev furiously, keeping Shorty by him all the time, as if he were afraid to lose him.

"Let's go to the captain!" other voices took up the cry.

"Akim Zakharich! Line the crew up!"

Things were beginning to look serious. Akim Zakharich scratched the back of his head worriedly.

Just at that moment, however, the young midshipman Koshutich, who was a favourite with the sailors, appeared in the forecastle. At sight of the officer the men fell silent. The boatswain turned eagerly to the midshipman.

"It's like this, sir," he said. "The chief officer has ordered me to throw Shorty overboard, and the men are very upset about it. Why should a poor innocent dog be killed? He's a well-behaved dog, as you know, sir, and he's been sailing with us these two years. And it's just that his stomach was a bit upset—that's all he'd done wrong."

The boatswain explained how the trouble had arisen, and added:

"Do us a kindness, sir, and put in a word for our Shorty. Ask him to let the dog off."

And Shorty, just as if he understood what they were talking about, gazed up at the midshipman with a friendly look in his eyes and gave a gentle wag of his stump of a tail.

"There, sir! Shorty himself is asking you!"

The midshipman, profoundly shocked at what he had just heard, promised to intercede on the dog's behalf. The excitement in the forecastle died down. Kochnev's face shone with hope.

VI

"Baron!" the midshipman said in an agitated voice as he burst into the wardroom. "The whole crew asks you to cancel your order and let Shorty off. Why should the men be deprived of their dog? What harm has he done, Baron?"

"This is none of your business, Midshipman Koshutich," the Baron replied. "And I must ask you not to forget yourself and keep your opinions to yourself. The clog is to go overboard!"

"So you think!"

"Silence please!" said the Baron, his face going white.

"So you are prepared to cause a riot among the crew by your cruelty?" cried the midshipman, quivering with indignation. "Well, you won't succeed in this. I'm going straight to the captain."

And off he went to the captain's cabin.

The other occupants of the wardroom looked with unconcealed hostility at the chief officer who, rather white, a contemptuous smile on his lips, nervously fingered one of his side whiskers. . .

About two minutes later the captain's servant came into the wardroom and told the Baron the captain wanted to see him.

"What is this I hear about the dog, Baron?" asked the captain wryly.

"Nothing, sir. I have ordered it to be thrown overboard," said the Baron coldly.

"For what reason?"

"I warned the men that if I caught the dog fouling the deck I'd have it thrown overboard. Just now I found it had done so, so I have given orders accordingly. It is essential, if I may say so, to the maintenance of proper naval discipline that the chief officer's orders should be strictly carried out."

Oh, you German blockhead! the captain said to himself, and his face assumed a still wrier expression.

Aloud he said:

"I must ask you, Baron, to cancel your order immediately, and in future to leave the dog in peace. It is on board the corvette with my permission. I'm sorry, but you'll have to cancel your order. You should not issue orders like that and upset the men for no reason at all."

"In that case, Captain, I beg to request you to cancel my order yourself, for I find it impossible to do so. And besides—— "

"What?" the captain demanded curtly.

"Besides, I am ill and must ask to be relieved of my duties as chief officer."

"Hand in your report then. Perhaps the climate ashore will suit your health better."

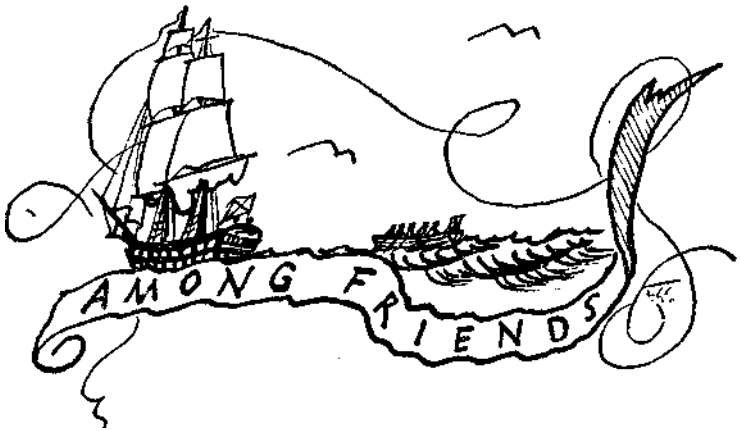
The Baron bowed and went out.

Next day, when the corvette arrived at Nagasaki, the Baron left the ship to the universal satisfaction of her crew, and a new chief officer was appointed in his place. The sailors sighed with relief.

After the Baron's departure, Shorty was able to lead his former carefree existence aboard the corvette, and the fact that he had been the means of ridding them of the detested Nagging Nick made him even more of a favourite with the crew than before.

As before, Shorty accompanied his friend Kochnev ashore and guarded him; as before, he performed the duties of "lookout man" and entertained the sailors with his tricks, and at the cry, "Nagging Nick is coming!" he would make a bolt for it below deck, then come running back again at once, well aware that his old enemy was no longer on board the corvette.

AMONG FRIENDS



I

SOON after the corvette had left for her foreign cruise, a young seaman named Ivan Artemyev, a handsome, ruddy-complexioned, dark-haired fellow, bursting with good health, who was a daring topgallant sail man and first-oar of the

captain's gig, caught a chill one rainy late-autumn day and was laid low with pneumonia.

His illness dragged on and the young sailor grew weaker and weaker. And a month later, when the corvette put in at Brest for a few days, and the ship's surgeon—a young man who had qualified only five years before—had made another long, careful examination of his patient's swarthy chest, once so powerful and now so pitifully emaciated, he went to the captain and suggested that Artemyev should be drafted out of the ship and left at Brest, at the naval hospital.

"Is he as bad as that, doctor?" asked the captain.

"Yes. Very bad. It's galloping consumption."

"Isn't there any hope of his recovering?"

"In my opinion—none at all," said the surgeon, with the aplomb often to be met with in very young doctors, and his expression became even more grave.

"It's a shame to send the poor fellow to die among strangers. But what else can we do? He'll be better off ashore anyway than in that sick-bay of ours. It's a poor sort of place to be ill in, I reckon, isn't it?"

"It's not a good place for serious cases. It's too small, the ventilation's bad, no conveniences."

"Quite so. Have you told Artemyev yet?"

"Not yet. But I'll tell him today, and then, if you permit, I'll take him to the hospital and hand him over to the French doctors tomorrow."

An hour after this conversation, the surgeon, feeling rather nervous, but trying to hide it, went down to the sick-bay, a small, spotlessly clean cabin, situated in the foredeck. Although a wind-sail had been made through the door, the air in the little low-ceilinged room was damp and fuggy, and a strong smell of medicine hung about it. The cabin contained four bunks, two on each side, placed one on top of the other. Three of the bunks were empty, but on the fourth, the lower one, his head turned towards the ship's side, was the sick-bay's only inmate, Able Seaman Ivan Artemyev.

He lay with his eyes wide open—big, dark, shining eyes, with that look of deep pensiveness in them that one often sees in the eyes of those who have long been suffering from an incurable disease. His swarthy haggard face with its peaked nose

and seemingly transparent nostrils, long bony chin, darkened with an unchecked growth of beard, sunken cheeks tinged with the characteristic flush of consumption, sharply protruding cheek-bones, and dried-up swollen lips—was calm and beautiful and deadly pale. One felt at once that Death was already watching over this only recently strong healthy body.

Seeing the surgeon enter at a time that was unusual for him, Artemyev raised his head—the hair at his forehead damp with sweat—from the pillow, and then lowered it again and, clutching the edge of the white baize coverlet with his long, thin, waxen fingers, stared up at him, a frightened, questioning, suspicious look in his eyes.

"Well, old chap, not rid of that fever yet?" said the surgeon, trying to make his voice sound light and casual—he thought to cheer Artemyev up in this way—while at the same time the sailor's frightened expression made him feel rather uncomfortable.

"Not yet, sir. But I'm all right, otherwise, I think. No aches or pains inside, sir," Artemyev replied eagerly.

And, still staring at the surgeon with a suspicious searching look, he added hastily:

"If only this fever will go, sir, then I can get strong again. But it won't leave off."

There was a note of hope in his hollow voice. It was obvious that he was straining every nerve to appear less weak than he really was. It was as if he was vaguely suspicious about the surgeon's intentions towards him and was trying to take him in.

The doctor, a genial, kind-hearted Muscovite, not yet sufficiently inured to his profession to look unmoved on human suffering, lowered his head to hide the embarrassment he felt, coughed for no particular reason, and avoiding the look of the patient's dark, searching eyes, went on speaking in the same artificially cheerful tone as before:

"That's just the point, my dear fellow. We've got to get rid of that fever of yours. But we'll get you well all right. That's certain."

He paused for a moment, then looked up arid met the joyful, credulous glance of the patient. And, notwithstanding the oppressive feeling that came over him at

this sight, he went on even more confidently and cheerfully than before:

"Yes, you'll get well all right. And then you'll be a fine strong fellow like you were before. But what you need now is a bit of rest ashore. This corvette of ours isn't a good place to get well in. See what I mean?"

"Ashore? Where ashore?" the sick man whispered, as if bewildered, in a frightened, plaintive voice.

"Why, here, at Brest. At the naval hospital. It's a fine hospital. They'll put you right there in no time. And when you're well again, they'll send you back to Kronstadt and then you can go back to the country, to your village. I'll give you a certificate for that."

It sounded very well, he thought. But at his very first words, such a terrified, anguished expression had appeared in the young sailor's face that the surgeon finished what he had to say in a very different tone from that of the cheerful heartiness with which he had begun.

For a few moments the sick man lay motionless, as if stunned.

But then he called out in a voice of agonized entreaty:

"Oh, please, sir! Don't send me ashore! Let me stay here! I beg you, in God's name!"

The surgeon tried to reason with him: on shore he would soon recover, but if he stayed on board his illness might drag on for goodness knows how long.

"Oh, sir! Please, doctor! If it pleases God not to let me get better, at least let me die among my own folk, not in some foreign place!"

His excitement made him cough. An ominous rattling came from his chest and a sort of gurgling sound. His big beautiful eyes gazed up at the doctor with a look of such desperate entreaty in them that the latter visibly wavered.

"But listen, Artemyev. It would be better for you ashore. . . ." he began again.

"Better? Amongst foreigners? Why, the loneliness would kill me, sir. Here I'm among friends, at least. I'll have someone to talk to and say a kind word to me. But there? Don't do that to me, sir! Let me stay! I'll soon get well—you wait, when we get to warmer parts I'll be a proper sailor again like I was before," the young fellow begged, apologizing, as it were, for his

invalid state and for not being able to be the proper, dashing sailor that he'd been.

Moved by this plea, the surgeon felt the cruelty of his decision and said kindly:

"Come, come, my dear fellow, don't upset yourself. If you don't want to go, you needn't."

A glad, grateful smile lit up Artemyev's pallid face and he said fervently:

"I won't forget your kindness as long as I live, sir!"

So the surgeon went back to the captain's cabin and told him of the young sailor's desperate plea and asked leave to keep him on board after all.

The captain readily gave his consent, observing:

"We'll soon be in the tropics. Wonderful air there. Maybe it'll do him good. What do you think, doctor?"

"Nothing can save the poor fellow now, I'm sorry to say. His days are numbered," the young surgeon answered confidently, slightly piqued at what he thought to be the captain's doubts of his professional opinion.

"And he was such a splendid sailor!" sighed the captain.

II

When the news reached the forecastle—that sailors' club-room where all the happenings in a ship's life are discussed—that Artemyev was to have been sent ashore to a French hospital, but had been allowed to stay on board after all, all the other sailors rejoiced sincerely on his account.

On all sides were heard remarks like:

"If he's got to die, poor fellow, let it be here among friends, not like a dog in a strange gutter!"

"Why, sure! You might as well throw him straight into the sea!"

"Here he's got someone to look after him, but there he wouldn't understand a thing they are talking about."

"And without a priest too. Fancy giving up the ghost like a heathen."

"How could the doctor think of such a thing! The idea of sending him to the French! Mind you, he's a good chap!"

"Yes, that's the funny part about it."

"Too young—that's what it is. He doesn't understand much if he thinks a Russian sailor would be willing to die among foreigners. It may be all right for

gentlefolks, but you'd never get a sailor to agree to it," old petty officer Arkhipov pronounced authoritatively, lighting his little pipe filled with home-grown tobacco and leaning back against the water-tub round which a group of sailors had congregated.

And, having lit it, he added emphatically and weightily:

"Yes, sir! An educated and clever fellow, mind you, and he hasn't learned sense. Fancy sending a fellow to the French! I shouldn't be surprised if he turned out to be a Frenchman himself."

A short silence followed this remark, as if the explanation for the young doctor's strange conduct had been found. A pronouncement from the lips of such an authority as petty officer Arkhipov, who was highly respected by his shipmates for his fairness, was a resolving chord, so to speak.

And so from that day onwards the kindly ship's surgeon was known to the sailors by the nickname of "Frenchy."

"Is it true, Ignat Stepanich, that Ivan Artemyev is going to die?"

These words were addressed to the feldsher, who had just joined them. The

speaker was one Ryabkin, a dark, stocky, middle-aged sailor with a good-natured face and a blue nose—testimony to his chief failing in life. He had three claims to fame aboard the corvette: as joker, humorist and story-teller; as a daring topman who would climb as high as the reef earring; and as an inveterate drunkard and debauchee, a man who, when his ship touched shore, would drink away not only every kopek of his pay but everything else he possessed as well.

The feldsher, a carroty-haired man of about forty with a pockmarked, ugly freckled face, which did not prevent him from thinking himself an irresistible Don Juan where Kronstadt chamber-maids were concerned, put on a solemn expression which he had imitated from doctors, placed his thumb under the lapel of his coat and replied not without a certain aplomb:

"Tuberculosis. Nothing can be done for him, boys."

"You mean—consumption?"

"There's two kinds—pneumonia's one, tuberculosis is t'other. But that's above your head, old chap. No one but a specialist can get the hang of that," the feldsher continued. (He loved to impress

his shipmates with tricky words like these.) "All I can tell you is this: poor Artemyev hasn't much longer to live."

"Really?" exclaimed Ryabkin in a cowed tone.

"Yes, sir! Tuberculosis is no joke. 'Twill do for a horse, let alone a man."

"Poor fellow! And he's such a nice boy," said Ryabkin, and his habitual jovial smile vanished from his face.

And all the sailors present felt terribly sorry for Artemyev.

"Don't be in such a hurry to bury him," said the old petty officer sternly and weightily. "Who knows? Maybe the Lord will make the man better for all that you and your doctor say."

"It isn't a question of what I say. I only wish he could recover. It's not I, but science that says it!"

"Science!" Arkhipov growled contemptuously. "If God wants to, he'll make your science look like nothing on earth!"

And stuffing his pipe into his pocket, he slowly walked away. The feldsher simply shrugged his shoulders as if to say: "Oh, what's the use of talking to people like you!"

III

A fortnight later found the corvette sailing in tropical waters, southward-bound. The weather was ideal—there was not a wisp of cloud in the sky and the tropical heat was tempered by a balmy breeze that blew true and steady, and by the fresh moisture of the ocean. The corvette, with all the canvas she could carry, slipped smoothly through the water at a steady seven or eight knots. No wonder our seamen call sailing in the tropics before a favourable trade wind a "holiday." It is indeed a happy restful time for them. They never even have to move a brace, to trim a sail. It is the most peaceful spell they ever get at sea. They keep the watch in divisions, and their watches are as pleasant as can be. They don't have to be constantly on the lookout for gales and rough weather, or to run to take in a reef or hoist or furl sails—in short, they don't have to be on the alert all the time. There is next to nothing to be done during these watches and the sailors just while the time away yarning, calling up memories, out there in

the tropics, of their far-away homeland, sometimes enjoying the sight of whales sending up fountains of water, or of fly-fish glittering in the sunshine, or of little petrels, flying far from shore, or huge snow-white albatrosses, or frigate-birds soaring in the limpid heights. And those enchanting tropical nights, with their myriads of twinkling stars, when the whole crew sleeps on deck, the sailors of the watch sitting in small groups and passing the time away listening to intimate confidences or to stories told by one of their number skilled in the art of story-telling.

The young officer of the watch, clad in a light, white uniform, paces up and down the bridge. His eyes search the horizon for the lights of passing ships and, breathing in great gulps of the cool air, he muses dreamily, giving himself up to the spell of memories. When tired of his long pacing, he leans over the handrail and dozes for a while open-eyed, as sailors can do, and then resumes his pacing—and again his thoughts fly to friends and dear ones far, far away, or to a pair of lovely eyes, still more lovely out there amid the ocean, or a little white hand with long slim fingers and

little blue veins shining through its delicate whiteness—a little hand which, only a short while ago, at Kronstadt, he was furtively kissing. . . . On these caressing tropical nights sailors who have not been ashore for a long time are apt to become sentimental.

And the corvette, rocking gently, sails on through the darkness of the night, smoothly and lightly cleaving the ocean with her breast, scattering the water with a gentle hissing sound into a thousand glittering fragments and leaving behind her a wide diamond-like wake, glittering with phosphorescent light.

Sometimes the silent charm of sailing in the tropics is broken by a sudden squall and torrential rain. The officer of the watch keeps a keen look-out for these squalls. Looking through his glasses, he will suddenly see on the distant horizon, which only a moment before seemed so clear, a tiny patch of grey. The patch grows bigger and bigger and rapidly turns into a dark storm-cloud, united with the ocean by a slanting grey pillar of rain lit up by sunbeams. Both the cloud and the grey broad pillar come rushing down on the corvette. The sun has disappeared, the sea has turned black, the air is stuffy and hot.

On comes the cloud, nearer and nearer. . . . The corvette is ready to receive the unexpected visitor. Royals and topgallants have been furled, and main and fore topsails reefed. The squall rushes towards her, encompasses her in a grey mist, heels her over, carries her along for a few minutes at terrifying speed, drenches the sailors in a deluge of tropical rain, and then rushes on again. And a few minutes later dark cloud and pillar of rain are flying farther and farther away till at last they are nothing but a tiny patch of grey on the opposite, starboard, horizon.

And once again a cheerful blue sky beams down upon the corvette. The air is filled with a delicious freshness, and the corvette, under full canvas again, is borne along by the same gentle, steady trade wind as before. The sailors' shirts have dried already. Only up in the rigging are glistening raindrops still to be seen. And already a newly erected awning shields the sailors' heads from the now blinding rays of the tropical sun.

Artemyev seemed better. The fever troubled him less often, he felt stronger, ate the food from the officer's mess with a good appetite and drank two glasses of

Madeira each day. On the doctor's orders he was taken up on deck in the mornings and spent the whole day there, lying in a hammock which had been slung for him in the ship's waist. From here he could watch the morning deck-cleaning and other duties and drills, listen to the familiar sound of the officers' words of command and the boatswain's colourful swearing and exchange a word or two with other sailors who came up to see him. The whole scene engrossed him, taking on a charm of novelty, as it were. Sometimes he would gaze at the vast expanse of the ocean as it glittered in the sunlight and at the turquoise sky above—gaze and be lost in thought, as if searching for an answer to some mystery which long contemplation of nature and strange new thoughts born of his long illness had suggested to him.

Sometimes he would fall to thinking about his home—his little poverty-stricken village with its smoky huts, far away in Russia; about the hard life of the peasants there; and about the dark forest where he had often gone of a night with his father to chop down "God's trees," which for some reason were considered government property; and with these thoughts a heavy

feeling would creep into his heart. He grieved for his folks, sorrowed over the hardships of the peasant's lot, asked himself why it was that God was not merciful to all alike; and then again became lost in dreamy meditation and gazed up at the beautiful blue sky as if it could give him an answer to life's riddles.

He was often overcome by drowsiness; he dropped off for short periods and had dreams. In these dreams of his Artemyev was once again the strong, sturdy sailor that he had been, racing aloft to furl a topsail or laying back on his oar when rowing the captain in his smart gig.

And then, suddenly awakening, he would be sadly conscious of his helplessness, and would gaze sorrowfully at his emaciated arms, finger his sharply protruding ribs and blame the surgeon for his slow recovery; and every morning, with touching simplicity, he prayed God to make him get well.

But even in these warmer parts recovery did not come, and the sick man became increasingly irritable and impatient. Yet the idea of death never entered his head. He still hoped that the fever would leave off eventually and then he'd get strong again.

What puzzled him was the special attention which everyone paid him now. The captain and other officers came to see him and said kind, encouraging words to him. Even the fierce old boatswain, who had cuffed him over the head occasionally, and was always swearing at him in the old days—even he dropped in to see him.

The boatswain's gruff voice had an unwonted note of gentleness in it, though the sight of the sick man's emaciated face made him frown. He would say a few words to the sick sailor, then .add:

"Well, old chap, you'll soon be on the mend now! You can't keep a sailor's arms idle for long! God is merciful! You'll get well again."

And Artemyev was conscious that everybody treated him in a special kind of way.

"Why is it?" he asked himself sometimes, touched by all this kindness.

And before long the poor fellow found out the reason for it, for he overheard two of the sailors saying that the surgeon did not give him much longer to live. " Twill be a mercy if he lasts another fortnight," they said forgetting his presence.

He lay as if stupefied, and at the same time something within him told him that what they had said was true: he was not long for this world.

And burning tears of grief rolled slowly down from his beautiful eyes.

IV

Ah, how long, how endlessly weary and long, these last nights in the little stuffy cabin were! The dying man scarcely slept at all. Sometimes he would drop off, then wake again and lie there motionless and open-eyed, the semi-darkness of the sick-bay dimly illumined by the faint light of a hurricane lamp. Silence all round: the only sounds were the lapping of the sea against the ship's side and the corvette's light creaking.

Misery—burning, hopeless misery!

But Ryabkin, the drunkard and debauchee, did not forget the sick man in his loneliness at night. Every night before going on watch or when relieved from it he would tiptoe down to the sick-bay and, at the expense of his own sleep, sit down on the floor beside Artemyev's bunk, comfort

him and cheer him and tell him some of his endless stories.

He told these stories in a fascinating, masterly way, working in variations of his own and tactfully changing the plots if the original ones were sad or ended in death.

And the young sailor was comforted by them somewhat and would fall asleep, lulled by the gentle rhythm of the narrator's voice.

One day, however, Artemyev unexpectedly interrupted one of his stories, saying:

"Ryabkin, there's something I wanted to ask you."

"What is it, Vanya?"

"It's about the next world... How will it be, do you think? Will it be hard for us there?"

Ryabkin, who had never given a thought to such delicate subjects, pondered for a moment; but his native shrewdness soon found an answer, and he said with conviction:

"We can take it, brother, that us chaps will have an easy time of it there. The gentry, now, they'll have a hard time, I must say, because life on earth's been so easy for them. They're all booked straight

for hell. Yes, sir. This way, if you please, ladies and gentlemen! But not all of us sailors will get to heaven either, I reckon. Take me, for example. I've got a nice hot berth waiting for me in hell because I'm a wine-bibber. When I get there I reckon they'll make me swallow melted lead. Yet I just can't give up drinking, old man! Yes, that's how it'll be in the next world," Ryabkin concluded, quite convinced, it seemed, of the accuracy of his sudden conception.

The young sailor was silent for a while. Then he said:

"Sometimes you think to yourself—when a man dies what becomes of him?"

"What silly things you think about! Chuck it! You and I are going to have a long innings yet in this world. My word, you should have seen what a whack the bo'sun gave Vaska Skoblikov last night! Right on the nose. Bled like a pig," said Ryabkin, changing the subject abruptly to divert his comrade's attention from the gloomy topic.

But Artemyev showed no interest in this item of news. Things which had occupied him in the past had lost interest for him. They now seemed distant and done with.

"And then that Mikhailov of yours—he didn't slacken the fore topgallant sail. He didn't half catch it from the chief officer today, I can tell you. But he only punched him once."

Artemyev made no comment. Instead he said suddenly:

"I don't want to die, brother, but it looks as if I've got to. It's God's will, it seems, that I be thrown into the ocean," he added sadly.

"Don't be silly! What nonsense! D'you think I don't know all about sailors and their health? I haven't been knocking about as a sailor for twelve years for nothing. . . . Why, there was a young chap on the Kobchik—he was sick like you are. Nearly a year he was laid up on our clipper. But afterwards he picked up something wonderful!"

But evidently his words were poor comfort to Artemyev.

Ryabkin realized this and started telling another of his stories.

"You ought to go and sleep, Ryabkin."

"Sleep? I don't feel like it. I'll have a good sleep in the morning."

"You're a real sport, Ryabkin. A good kind soul. God will forgive you your wine-bibbing for it."

V

The corvette was approaching the equator. Artemyev was sinking fast.

Early one morning he asked midshipman Yushkov to come and see him. Yushkov, who had taught him to read and write, had often had talks with him, and written letters to his parents for him, was very fond of the young sailor.

"Forgive me bothering you, sir. Will you do me a last favour? Will you write home for me to my father and mother and when you get back to Russia send them these things of mine?"

The midshipman tried to cheer him up, but the sailor stopped him:

"It's no use, sir. I know that I'm dying."

And handing the midshipman two gold coins wrapped up in a bit of cloth, he pointed to a baize kerchief, two shirts, a pair of boots, a knitted scarf and one or two other things piled on the sick-bay table, and asked him to send them to his father and mother.

"And will you write and say that I died, and that I was always a dutiful son and that I will pray for them, and for all peasants, in

the next world. And that I send my best regards to my sisters and brothers and to all the village. Will you write that, sir?"

"Yes," said the midshipman, with difficulty restraining his tears.

"And will you write another letter, sir, to Kronstadt, to Avdotya Nikolayeva? And when you get to Kronstadt send her these presents here."

And he indicated with his eyes a red silk kerchief and a little ring with an artificial stone in it, which he had purchased in Copenhagen.

"The address is on the kerchief. Her mother has a stall there in the market. And when you write, say that she was wrong not to believe me. She thought I was only playing and just laughed at me. And tell her that if I went out with other girls, it was only because my heart was so sore—she was the only one I really cared for. And tell her I send her my best regards, and kiss her sweet lips and may God send her every joy. Will you write that, sir?"

"Yes, I will."

"And lastly, thank you, sir, for all your kindness to me. Good-bye."

Hardly able to restrain his sobs, the midshipman kissed the dying man on the forehead and hurried out of the room.

VI

That same night the young sailor died.

They clothed his body in full sailor's uniform, and early the next morning carried it up to the quarter-deck and placed it on a board supported by trestles. At midday, in the presence of the captain, the officers and the rest of the ship's company, the priest read the funeral service. And this service and the mournful singing of the excellent ship's choir, out there in the midst of the glittering, boundless ocean, far, far away from their homes and dear ones, made an unbearably sad impression on them all.

After the service the crew filed past to pay their last respects to their comrade. The ship's flag had been flying at half mast since daybreak as a sign that there was a dead man aboard.

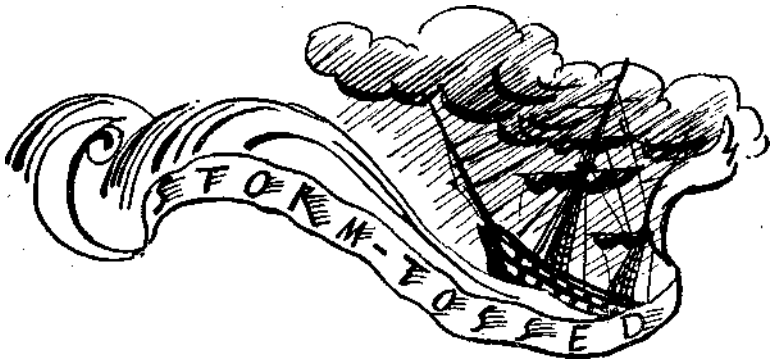
Late in the afternoon the corpse was sewn up in a tight-fitting sack, a cannon-ball at the feet, and after the last rites and

military honours had been performed, four sailors, amid profound silence, carried the board with the dead man to the corvette's side and tipped it up, and the body of the young sailor vanished with a light splash into the limpid blue of the ocean.

The men dispersed in grim silence. Many had tears in their eyes, and Ryabkin was crying like a child.

And out to starboard the sun sank slowly and majestically, suffusing the distant horizon with a crimson glow.

STORM-TOSSED



I

"WAKE up, sir! Alexander Ivanich! Wake up!" These words were addressed to his master by

Kirillov, Midshipman Opolyev's servant, a short, stocky, dark-complexioned young sailor with a ring in one of his ears. With his legs wide apart to keep his balance, he was holding on to the door-post with one hand, while with the other he was tugging gently at one of the midshipman's feet; the latter, despite the violent pitching which was

throwing the corvette *Sokol* about like a ball on the surging waves of the Atlantic, was lying in his little cabin fast asleep. There was not so much as a sound in answer.

The midshipman was a lie-abed. "A bad riser," as his orderly put it.

And Kirillov, who was well aware that it was he who would get a scolding if his master was even a minute late for the watch, resumed his tugging after a slight pause, but this time with greater energy.

"Wake up, sir! It's time for your watch! Alexander Ivanich! Please get up!"

"Go to the devil!" said a sleepy voice from the bunk.

"But you must, sir. Alexander Ivanich!"

"I'm dead!" mumbled the midshipman. "Hop it!"

And pulling away the leg which the orderly was tugging, he drew the blanket over his head, turned over on his other side and was about to fall asleep again when a sudden violent heave of the corvette made him strike his forehead against the bulkhead and brought him fully awake.

From under the bed-clothes there peeped out a sleepy, boyish face, soft and pink and handsome, with the beginnings of

a fair silky beard and virginal moustache, and a sheaf of curly corn-blond hair. Screwing up his big, round, hazel eyes, he smiled the sleepy, happy smile of a dreaming child, obviously still under the spell of some vision which had carried him far away from his present surroundings.

He was in a garden in the country, a garden filled with bright green foliage and sweet-smelling flowers. Fragrant limes stood around, and under the trees was a rickety little bench with the names "Lena" and "Alexander" cut out on it. A beautiful girl in a plain white linen frock was sitting beside him. Her dark, pensive eyes were soft with love. She had lovely curly hair, with a sprig of lilac stuck in it. She was gazing into his eyes with wistful tenderness, was this sweet girl, listening to her lover's rapturous words, and as if afraid to break the enchanted spell of their happiness by speaking, she simply pressed his hand harder with her own soft warm one, while tears trembled on her eyelashes. "Forever," she whispered.

"Forever," he replied, in the same barely audible voice. They sat there for a long time, and evening, soft and enchanting, still found them there, speechless with

happiness. A deep hush hung over the garden. There was not a sound, not a murmur to be heard. And up on high the stars twinkled tenderly, as though admiring the young lovers and listening to the beating of their brimming hearts.

"Lena! Alexander Ivanich! Come and have your tea!" The gentle voice of Lena's mother was still ringing in his ears.

All these memories which the wonderful dream had brought back to him seemed tantalizingly clear and real. The young midshipman was still under their spell, and he longed, ardently longed, to retain his dream for a little longer.

.But in a few seconds it vanished, faded away like a puff of smoke in the air.

In the dim light of his cabin, the porthole of which, tightly closed, at one moment was buried in foamy seas and the next, emerging from them, allowed a faint glimmer of morning light to penetrate its dull glass, Opolyev could see the figure of his smart, efficient little servant, who was holding on with both hands, and reeling together with the cabin and everything else in it. He could hear the maddening creaking of the corvette, became conscious

of the violent pitching and finally grew wide awake.

The happy smile disappeared from his face.

"My word, she is pitching!" he said, trying to get into a position where he wouldn't be bumped against the bulkhead again, and his face assumed a serious expression.

"It's been mighty rough, sir!"

"What's the time?"

"It wants only half an hour till eight." -, "What's it like on deck?"

"God preserve us! It's roaring like blazes!"

"It's blown up fresh overnight, has it?"

"Yes, sir. They've furled the foresail and taken in four reefs. The captain's been up all night," the servant reported.

And after a pause, the young sailor (for whom this was his first long cruise) added in a nervous mysterious tone:

"The chaps in the forecastle say it looks as though there's a regular storm coming on, sir! The wind's howling in the rigging . . . and the seas—God preserve us all—they're like great rolling mountains."

"You're frightened of a storm, I see."

"Yes, sir, I am," the young sailor replied naively and shamefacedly.

"There's nothing to be frightened of, old chap. We can hold our own against storms all right!" the young officer said authoritatively and with affected carelessness. In point of fact he had never been in a storm either and although he did not show it, was beginning to feel rather uneasy about the infernal pitching which was tossing the corvette about like a nutshell.

Down there in the cabin the danger seemed greater than it was.

"Yes, sir," Kirillov hastened to agree, though he did so more as a matter of discipline and from a sense of delicacy that forbade him contradicting his "kind master," than for any other reason.

But the involuntary fear that he was trying to conceal did not leave the young sailor.

"Is it cold on deck?"

"Piercing cold, sir."

"Got my sou'wester out?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Well, I suppose I must get up."

But before leaving the warmth of his bunk, the midshipman, who was again in

the grip of intruding memories and was wishing more than ever just at this moment that his dream had been reality, said unexpectedly, with an involuntary sigh:

"I reckon we'd be better off ashore, Kirillov, eh?"

"You bet, sir," the young sailor answered eagerly, his face lighting up with a smile. "A man feels better on dry land. Solid earth, you know! But out here it's just hell. If I was free I'd go straight back to my village."

"Would you?" the midshipman said, smiling.

"Yes, sir, I would."

"And I'd go straight back to Zasizhye," the midshipman thought.

Aloud he said with a mirthless smile:

"Unfortunately there's no way of getting away from here, Kirillov, is there?"

"No, sir. Nothing but water all round."

"So in the meanwhile, old chap, see about my tea. And mind it's hot!"

"Yes, sir. The tea is ready. The chief officer is having his already. But it's difficult to drink while the ship's pitching like this," Kirillov added and he went out to see about getting some hot tea for his "kind master"

who treated his servant very well and often had heart to heart chats with him.

He made his way to the galley. The pitching threw him crazily now this way, now that, and he was hard put to it to keep on his feet. Meeting a friend there, another officer's servant, a young sailor like himself, Kirillov—with the dual object perhaps of raising his own spirits and concealing his fear from his friend and other members of the crew who were in the galley—put on a joking air and remarked:

"It's just like a swing! It's as much as a fellow can do to keep his feet, let alone walk!"

And he added rather perkily:

"Why, Vasily, whatever is the matter? Not scared, are you?"

"I can't help thinking . . . what would happen if . . . my, what a storm!" said the other, white with seasickness and fear.

"Don't think such things, Vasya. What is there to be frightened of? If it's going to be a storm, let it. We can hold our own against a storm all right!" Kirillov said valiantly, repeating what the midshipman had said.

And he even forced himself to laugh, though secretly he was terrified out of his wits.

II

About ten minutes later, during which time he had had to assume the most incredible poses ever known to acrobats in order to keep his balance while he was getting washed and dressed, the young midshipman left his cabin.

It was damp and stuffy below, and the air was heavy with the thick sour smell of the crew's unventilated sleeping quarters. All the hatches were tightly closed and no fresh air could get in. The watch off duty were sitting or lying about on the deck, silent and grave, now and then exchanging remarks about the "accursed" weather. Some of them were seasick. Near the engine-room hatchway an old sailor named Shcherbakov (he was also the ikon-keeper, that is, he had charge of the corvette's ikon and officiated at religious service as clerk and chanter) was reading the Bible in a low, droning voice, and round him sat a small group of sailors listening with rapt attention, and not so much understanding the meaning of the old Slavonic text as

admiring the reader's chanting emotional voice and its solemn elevated tones.

It was no easy matter to walk along the deck. It seemed to slip away from beneath you, and it needed considerable art and dexterity to choose the right moments to cross it.

The wardroom, usually enlivened at this time by the officers' gathering for tea, was now almost empty. Nearly all the officers were lying in their cabins. The big lamp hanging over the table screwed into the floor, was swaying to the accompaniment of the monotonous creaking of the bulkheads. The bookcase and the piano, likewise firmly secured to the deck, were also creaking. Through the tightly closed skylight of the wardroom the booming of the wind raging outside could be heard. The corvette was shaking from stem to stern, and down on the lower deck this shaking felt more violent. The wardroom, usually full of noise and laughter, had a sombre, cheerless air about it.

Merry, playful Laika, a homely ginger-haired dog, stub-tailed and of dubious breed, which had strayed on to the corvette when the latter was fitting out for its overseas voyage at Kronstadt and had

been named "Laika" by the sailors, was now huddled in a corner of the wardroom, whimpering from time to time and gazing round helplessly with dull eyes, as if wondering how a poor dog could keep its foothold on this slippery oilcloth? Another notable absentee was Laika's friend, Vaska, a plump white cat belonging to the gunnery officer. Evidently Vaska was seasick, too.

The only human occupant of the wardroom was the chief officer, a stocky, vigorous, dark-haired man of about thirty-five. He was sitting on the sofa, dressed in a short, thick, cloth coat, a grave, worried look on his sunburnt face. He was carefully balancing a glass of tea in one of his muscular, hairy, bronzed hands and trying to seize the moments when it was possible to lift the glass to his thick, black moustache without spilling its contents.

"Good morning, Alexei Nikolayevich!"

"My respects, Alexander Ivanovich!"

Holding on to the bench screwed to the floor beside the table, the young midshipman went up to the chief officer to shake hands, land in doing so all but fell over him.

"They say the wind has freshened overnight, Alexei Nikolayevich?" the young man said, as he sat down on the bench beside the sofa.

"It has," the other answered curtly. He went on sipping his tea in thoughtful silence, then said:

"It's these damn'd heavy seas! If we don't look out they'll sweep one of the boats away or smash the hull," he added angrily and worriedly, and finishing his tea he left the wardroom and went up on deck.

"Hi, steward! When's that tea coming?" shouted Opolyev, left to himself.

But the words had barely left his lips before Kirillov's dark, square, close-cropped head appeared in the doorway. He stumbled forward suddenly as the ship pitched, but managed to keep his balance and not to lose hold of the glass of tea he was carrying, wrapped in a napkin. Behind him came a second servant with a sugar-basin and a basket containing biscuits. When these had been safely brought to him, Opolyev gulped his tea down and asked for another glass.

Just then the chief navigating officer came down to get a quick "reviver" in the shape of a hot glass of tea. He was a little

old man with a windbreaker, glistening with spray, thrown over his coat, a long scarf twined round his neck and his cap, pulled well down over his eyes. Everything on him was-old and shabby, but he had a way of wearing things that made him look extremely smart, giving him the air of an old sea-, wolf.

Notwithstanding the violent pitching, he trod the deck with, the real "sea-legs" of a sailor, without holding on to anything, now balancing himself, now suddenly crouching on his haunches—assuming the most varied positions as the ship, pitched this way and that.

The young midshipman could see from the expression on the. old man's bland, wrinkled face that he was not in the bad humour he usually was in when people pestered him with, questions or when the corvette was sailing in dangerous waters and he wasn't quite sure of his reckoning. After the usual exchange of greetings, he asked him:

"How are things up there, Ivan Ivanich?"

"You'll soon see for yourself, my lad. I suppose it's your watch—you're such an early bird this morning!" the old man, said, laughing. "Things are just as they usually

are at sea," he added, sipping his tea, to which he had added some brandy to give it a "taste," with relish.

"Whereabouts are we now, Ivan Ivanich?"

"We're off the Bay of Biscay—a hundred miles off shore. Let's have another glass," the old man shouted to the servant. "And don't forget the brandy! Makes it taste nice!" he added, turning to the young officer. "You ought to try it. It's a good remedy, too, against seasickness. Have you been seasick?"

"No, not at all," the midshipman boasted.

"Everyone's seasick at first—till they get used to it, that is. But there are some who never get used to it. I remember a lieutenant I served with who was like that. They had to send him back to Russia, poor fellow."

"I suppose it will calm down by the evening," said Opolyev, trying to make his voice sound free and easy, as if it was all the same to him what the weather did.

Ivan Ivanich laughed.

"Calm down, did you say?"

"Yes, won't it?"

"In the evening we'll be getting a real roarer, I reckon. The glass is falling like anything."

The old navigating officer, who had weathered many a storm in the course of his long life at sea and had even been shipwrecked in a schooner off Kamchatka, uttered these words in as calm a tone as if he were speaking about the most ordinary things, and after a few more sips at his tea-and-a-dash, he gave a grunt of satisfaction and said:

"Now my cough won't worry me. I was coughing all the time up there. Hey, Vasilyev!" he shouted.

The servant appeared.

"Just another dash of brandy. . . . Stop, that's enough! It'll keep the chill out," he added again, as if in self-justification.

The old man believed in curing his own and other people's ailments by administering brandy, or, in some cases, sherry and marsala. Other kinds of wine simply did not exist for him and he had a special contempt for champagne, which he called "lady's gargle."

"So you think there's going to be a storm, Ivan Ivanich?" Opolyev asked again carelessly, and at the same time he

blushed, conscious of a tremor in his voice which he was afraid the old man had noticed.

"I am certain. A real storm, lad. This Bay of Biscay's a dirty corner, you know. Every time I cross her she treats me to a nice little storm."

The old man drained his glass with visible relish, pulled his peaked cap down and went back on deck.

Opolyev looked at the wardroom clock. There was five minutes to go before eight.

He finished his tea, got Kirillov to help him on with his oilskins, and with the first stroke of eight climbed the ladder to the deck. He was filled with excitement at the thought of experiencing the "first storm" of his life, and again for a few minutes his mind flew back to that fragrant country garden, to Lena and the little black mole on her pink cheek and those lovely eyes of hers. . . .

"How wonderful it is there, but here—— " the young officer thought to himself.

He came out on deck and immediately found himself in an entirely different atmosphere.

A sharp, icy wind swept over him with a shower of spray. He heard it howling

through the rigging, saw grey, raging ocean and instantly his thoughts took another turn—a nautical one.

And assuming a careless air he swaggered up to the bridge as boldly as if hell itself held no fears for him and storms were just an everyday matter to him.

III

Notwithstanding the intense fear that he experienced at first, the majestic spectacle of the raging ocean held the young midshipman's gaze, filling him with awe and a humble consciousness of the weakness of the "monarch of Nature" before the mighty power of the elements.

All around him, as far as the eye could see, the ocean was one boiling mass of foam, a hilly expanse of waves, borne along with what seemed explosive force and crashing their silver crests together with a mighty roar. These waves which, in the distance, seemed like little hills, turned out at closer quarters to be enormous mountains of water, among which, now sinking into the troughs, now rising on the lofty crests, the little black corvette sailed,

her masts almost stripped, her topmasts on deck meeting the oncoming storm close-hauled and with close-reefed topsails.

Pitching and rolling violently, the corvette would rise on a wave and cut her way through it: or sometimes she would plunge into it and part of the wave would go sweeping over the forecastle while the rest of it battered furiously at her bows scattering showers of diamond spray. Now and again she would ship a sea and then the crests of the waves would go rolling over her deck and pour through the scupper holes on the other side.

A tremendous sea would be approaching. There it was, towering over the lowered stern, and seeming just about to fall on the little ship which now seemed like a tiny shell, fall on her and utterly destroy her and her inmates. But just at that moment the corvette's prow would sink with another wave and the stern would rise steeply; a mighty wall of water would go smashing against it; and then the stern would sink again as before.

The whole sky was shrouded in dark masses of cloud which raced overhead in one direction. For a moment the sun would peep out, gilding the grey ocean with

shining light, only to disappear again behind the clouds. The wind raged on, tearing off the crests of the waves as it passed and sprinkling showers of silvery spray, howling sullenly in the rigging, and shaking and buffeting it as if angry at meeting with obstacles.

The watch, wearing oilskins over their blue flannel shirts, stood clinging to the rigging. They were all silent and grave. Not a joke, not a laugh to be heard among them. When a lofty wave lashed them with its spray they just shook the water off themselves like ducks and went on gazing, now at the surging ocean, now at the bridge.

On the bridge, as if chained to it, stood the elderly captain, his feet wide apart and his hands grasping the handrail. His face looked calm as he fixed his eyes alternately on the horizon and the sails above. He had been up all night, and his tired, concentrated, wind-battered face looked the older for it. He was going to turn in for an hour or two now, but before doing so, had decided to take in the topsails, so as to meet the oncoming storm with less sail-area, under storm-sails alone.

And he gave Opolyev the order in a sharp, hoarse voice:

"Furl the topsails and hoist the reefed trysails, the mizzen-sail and fore and main staysails!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" answered the midshipman, and putting the megaphone to his lips, he shouted:

"In topsails! Topmen, stand by!"

And when the topmen reached the shrouds, he gave the order:

"Lay out upon the yards!"

Holding on tightly to the shrouds, the sailors climbed up the rigging slowly and cautiously, and having reached the topmasts, crawled along the violently shaking yards. With bated breath the young officer watched these tiny human figures aloft, swinging from side to side with the shuddering yards and making fast the sails in such a fearful gale. He expected to see one of them blown overboard at any moment. His frightened eyes did not leave the yards for one second. The captain and the chief officer kept their eyes fixed on them, too. Evidently the same disturbing thought was in their minds.

But the sailors hung on tenaciously with hands and feet. They clung to the yards with one hand and pulled up the heavy canvas of the sails with the other till all was completed, and then Opolyev, with lightened heart, ordered:

"Topmen, on deck!"

After that the storm-sails were set, and the captain said to Opolyev, in his usual commanding tone:

"If anything happens, call me. And see they keep awake there at the helm!" he shouted for the helmsmen to hear.

And he went down to his cabin to rest. The chief officer remained on deck together with Opolyev.

By the end of his watch Opolyev felt quite at home at his station and the storm had lost some of its fears for him. And when midday came and he was relieved, he went down to the wardroom with the proud air of a man who had "been through it." But no one noticed his proud air.

The foul weather had interfered with the ship's cooking arrangements, so lunch consisted of cold dishes only: ham and tinned foods of various kinds. Lunch was served in the wardroom on a wooden rack fixed over the table, in the recesses of

which lay the table appointments, the bottles wrapped in napkins, etc. The stewards served the food with difficulty—they were hard put to it to keep on their feet with the ship pitching and rolling as she did. The meal was eaten quickly and in silence, there was none of the usual cheerful conversation, and many of the officers had no appetite. Only the old navigating officer was his usual self, eating enough for two and drinking his usual lunch-time wine ration: a bottle of marsala

After lunch all went to their cabins.

IV

By nightfall the gale had developed into a storm.

Opolyev, who had gone to sleep with his clothes on, was woken up by a tremendous crash. He opened his eyes and found the whole cabin lit up by lightning. Then there was darkness again, followed by another clap of thunder.

He groped for the door in the darkness and staggered out to the mess deck. The corvette was being tossed about in every direction. Not a single sailor was asleep

and the hammocks hung limp and empty. White-faced and frightened, the watch off duty were sitting huddled together in little groups. Many of them were heaving loud sighs or whispering prayers and crossing themselves. In the dim light of the swaying lamps this mass of terrified men was a depressing sight; one of them, with a loud groan, said: "It's time to put clean shirts on, boys. This is the end!"

The boatswain swore heartily at this, then added in his gruff voice:

"Shut your jaw, you! Trying to scare the men! I'll give you shirts! Call yourselves seamen!"

And he wound up with a stream of hearty curses that had a cheering effect upon the men.

As in the morning, old Shcherbakov, the ikon-keeper, was sitting by the engine-room hatchway, reading the Bible to a, circle of sailors.

And his monotonous, solemn singsong voice sounded loud and clear in the intervals between the peals of thunder:

"The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the seaside. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat;

and the whole multitude stood on the shore."

Holding on to the ladder with both hands stood Kirillov, sobbing quietly to himself.

"Is that you, Kirillov?" Opolyev called out to him.

"Yes, sir."

"Goodness me—you're not crying, are you?"

"I'm afeard, sir. And Shcherbakov reads so sad-like."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Aren't you a sailor?"

"Yes, sir," said the young sailor, trying hard to restrain his tears.

"Well, behave like one then. Come, old chap, no more of this nonsense," the young midshipman added in a kindly tone, "We're not in any real danger, you know." And white and agitated himself, he patted his servant on the back, and holding on to the handrails, opened the hatch and went out on deck.

Clutching the ship's cannons for support, he made his way round to the poop, under the bridge. Having arrived there, he looked around him and what he saw made him numb with fear.

The corvette was plunging madly in the seas, which were sweeping over her bows. The thunder crashed ceaselessly and flashes of lightning, stabbing the lowering storm-clouds with zigzags of fire, showed up the raging ocean with its mountainous waves and the deck of the corvette with side plating torn out in places. One of the boats had been washed away.

The storm seemed to have reached the highest pitch of intensity and was battering the corvette, bent on destroying her. But the corvette held her own, and continued on her hazardous course, now bouncing on top of the waves, now plunging heavily into the troughs, and all the while creaking and groaning in every part, as if in pain. The sailors crowded around the poop and the quarter-deck, hanging on to the lifelines that had been rigged. Each time the lightning gave one of its blinding flashes, they silently crossed themselves.

The captain stood at the helm directing the six helmsmen which way to steer by short, sharp words of command. His tired, white, grave face stood out clearly in the light of a ship's lantern. Beside him stood the navigating officer and the chief officer.

For the first few minutes deathly terror seized the young midshipman, but gradually his fear gave way to a sort of numb stupefaction.

"If the ship is wrecked we're lost for certain," the thought flashed through his mind.

And he stood there, clinging to something, stunned and silent.

"God have mercy on us!" came the voice of the signal-man who was standing a short distance away from him. "Look at that, sir!"

But Opolyev had already seen. The lightning had revealed the silhouette of a sinking ship almost within hailing distance. He saw the figures of her crew, their arms outstretched in desperation, and involuntarily he closed his eves.

Another flash lit up the ocean, but the ship was gone.

Opolyev crossed himself, and a heavy sigh went up from the sailors at his side.

"All drowned," said one of them.

* * *

The young midshipman remained on deck, watching the fury of the storm, for an hour or perhaps two—just how many he could not himself have said. At last it

seemed to quieten down a little and he went below.

There terror reigned as before and Shcherbakov was still reading from the Bible.

The young man flung himself down in his berth, but it was a long time before he could get to sleep, so shaken was he by what he had just seen. Finally, a heavy sleep came over him.

V

It was broad daylight in the cabin when he awoke. He sat up in his bunk and found, to his joyful surprise, that the ship was rolling quite differently—with a steady normal motion. He poked his head out of the cabin door and saw that the sailors were talking cheerfully together. The hatches had all been opened and the stuffy smell had gone.

"Send Kirillov here," he shouted.

Kirillov appeared, looking very cheerful.

"Good morning. So it's calmed down, has it?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Well, I told you we'd hold our own against a storm, didn't I?" the midshipman said.

"Yes, sir!"

The wardroom was at its liveliest. All the officers were there, and all were talking about the storm and the fine way the *Sokol* had withstood it, getting away with only slight damage to her hull and the loss of a boat. But for some reason they all avoided mentioning the ship they'd seen go down.

"It was a proper little storm. Gave us a good shaking up," said the old navigating officer. "And it's still fresh now! Well, never mind . . . the mercury is rising," he added, and having drunk his two glasses of tea-and-a-dash, went up on deck to "shoot the sun."

It was still pretty rough, but it was possible to drink tea in the normal way now, and Opolyev, making up for the previous day's abstinence, ate nearly half a tin of English biscuits with his tea, not forgetting to feed the playful, affectionate Laika and plump Vaska, at the same time.

After that he went up to look at the ocean.

It was visibly calming down and the huge breakers which still rolled across it had

nothing like their former fury; and the corvette, main and foremast topsails reefed, was carried along by a fresh, steady breeze at about eleven knots, sailing smoothly before the sea.

The carpenters were already repairing the damage to the ship's hull and humming as they worked.

VI

Two days later Kirillov woke his master after 8 a.m.

"Sir! Alexander Ivanich! Wake up, sir. We're making Madeira!"

After a good deal of shaking, the midshipman awoke.

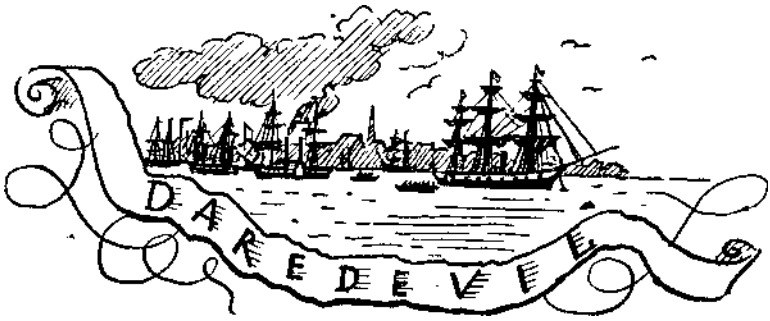
"We'll soon be coming to anchor, sir. It's a wonderful day!" the servant said joyfully.

Opolyev dressed quickly and ran up on deck.

Smoke puffing from her funnel, the corvette under steam was approaching a steep, mountainous island, enveloped in a hazy mist. The damage caused by the storm having been repaired, the *Sokol* shone with cleanliness and polish under the rays of a blinding sun that was drifting

slowly across the cloudless blue sky. And the ocean which had caused them such turmoil only a little while ago was now rolling in a gentle swell, its alluring transparent blueness softly licking the hull of the now steady corvette.

DAREDEVIL



I

IN the Transund roads, where the training squadron of the Baltic Fleet rides at anchor for the best part of the brief summer, there lay the ironclad *Grozyashchy* whose flag-officer, a rear-admiral of venerable age, was working out his term of "service afloat" for full flag appointment in the rank of vice-admiral.

It was past twelve of a cool and cloudy day late in June. The sailors had just had their dinner on the ships of the squadron

and the boatswains had piped the crews to rest.

Five minutes later found boatswain Zhdanov of the *Grozyashchy* drinking tea and puffing at his cigarette in his small tidy cabin in the forecastle, the appointments of which made no small claims to elegance.

The photographs of high-ranking personages, including those of Father Johann of Kronstadt and the Commander of the *Grozyashchy*, in handsome fretwork frames made for the boatswain as la "gift" by one of the sailors, hung in their proper order upon the bulkhead facing the bunk, which was neatly covered with a grey woollen blanket with two pillows in white pillow-cases at the head.

Over the bunk, upon a cheap rug, hung a sky-blue picture frame with hand-painted forget-me-nots containing the cabinet photograph of a young woman with a pretty face and stocky figure, the fingers of her excessively large hands outspread obviously for the purpose of displaying the rings, and with a brooch at her throat and ear-rings in her ears.

Needless to say, this lady in the smart dress and feathered hat was spouse of boatswain Zhdanov.

He was quite unlike the boatswains of the old days, those brave seamen who performed deeds of heroism without ever realizing they were heroes, those shocking swearers, reckless drunkards when ashore, rough but not vicious men, who never shunned their fellows, ill-used sailors like themselves, whom they naturally regarded as their comrades; men who looked upon "blowing the gaff" to superior officers as something unworthy of a decent boatswain.

What is more, they knew that under the unwritten law of the forecastle any boatswain who did not play the game or used his fists too freely would quickly be brought to heel.

Zhdanov was a boatswain of the modern type and, naturally, stood on an incomparably higher plane of culture. He was a short stocky young man of about thirty with a tendency to corpulence, who dressed smartly, knew his manners, and kept his voice down to a well-bred pitch. He had big, round eyes, which had a zealous, resolute look in them, a freckled, pink-and-white face, grave and smug-looking, with close-cropped ginger hair and a short-trimmed fiery red little beard. On the fourth

finger of his well-groomed hand he wore a gold wedding ring and on the little finger a ring with a turquoise.

Of course, he drank neither vodka nor wine, and only once in a while did he let himself go to the extent of a bottle of beer. His swearing, quiet, succinct and impressive, lacked the steady fervour of the artist.

Bursting with vanity and a sense of self-importance, he kept aloof from the sailors so as not to lose prestige by "hobnobbing" with the "common herd," who were prone to forget to keep their distance in dealing with a boatswain of his calibre, a man who stood a head and shoulders above them. Not for nothing did he subscribe to the newspaper Light, read books, and consider himself a very clever and shrewd boatswain, who would work his v/ay up in the world.

He treated the sailors with impressive severity, was ruthless, especially towards those guilty of a breach of discipline, and did not brook contradiction. With the officers, on the other hand, he was deference itself.

Zhdanov did not like naval service, and particularly disliked the sea and feared it in

its menacing moods. But he was a smart and zealous boatswain, who flaunted his pedantry and blameless conduct in the eyes of his superior officers.

Taking advantage of his position, Zhdanov had not been overscrupulous in the means he had used for feathering his nest. During his six years of service he had laid up a nice little pile. Tight-fisted and shrewd, he planned to go into business when he was discharged.

The sailors feared and disliked the arrogant and bullying boatswain, but that did not worry him. He was sure that his strictness with the men was appreciated and approved by the captain and the chief officer, and that was all that mattered. The sailors would not dare to complain about him. In that respect they were "dependable," and besides, he had them well in hand.

There was one exception, though—a sailor serving his first year aboard the *Grozyashchy*, who claimed the boatswain's anxious and resentful attention.

"The fellow's a regular daredevil!" the boatswain thought.

He knew, of course, that during the crew's rest he had no right to disturb the

sailors without special need. Nevertheless, he sent for Daredevil.

II

When the man—a spare darkish young sailor of short stature—came into the cabin and stopped in the doorway without showing the slightest sign of fear, the boatswain felt an uneasy sense of irritation rising within him.

He leisurely finished his glass of tea, deliberately ignoring the sailor.

At last he fixed him with a cold angry stare, and lowering his voice, uttered slowly and significantly:

"Mityushin!"

"Yes."

"I suppose you" guess why I have sent for you?"

"1 am bad at guessing," Mityushin answered.

The sailor had not addressed the boatswain as "sir" or by his name and patronymic (Ivan Artemyevich). He stood there quite at his ease, his usually vivacious swarthy face with its finely modelled features set in a grave

expression. There was an undertone of irony in his level, coldly official mellow voice, and a mocking smile flashed briefly in his keen black eyes.

"Look the way the blighter stands in front of his bo'sun!" Zhdanov said to himself.

Flushing with annoyance, he said:

"Have a try!"

"What am I supposed to guess at?"

"For one thing, that I can see right through a man and know him inside out."

Mityushin said nothing. His very silence had a mocking quality.

"D'you get my meaning?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Yet you think a lot of yourself, don't you!" Zhdanov sneered.

Mityushin let that remark pass too. Only his eyes smiled, his thin upper lip at the corner of his mouth twitched, and his face assumed a defiant and somewhat haughty expression.

The man's ill-concealed disdain was not lost upon the boatswain. With what pleasure would Zhdanov have bashed him in the jaw! But he was afraid of Daredevil. One could expect anything from him.

Convulsed with rage, barely able to control himself, the boatswain went on slowly in a grim rasping voice:

"Mind you don't get into serious trouble!"

Mityushin yawned with a deliberate air of boredom and defiance, and asked indifferently:

"What trouble's that?"

"Don't play the fool! I'll stand none of your insolence! Who d'you think you're talking to?"

"To the bo'sun."

"You'd better look out!" Zhdanov shouted menacingly.

"Look out for what?"

"I'll show you bo'suns!"

"You needn't trouble. I've seen the kind of bo'sun you are. I'm carrying out my duties properly and I know the law."

"Oh, you do, do you?" the boatswain said ominously, his face livid.

"You bet your life!" the sailor said defiantly.

Zhdanov leapt to his feet as if he had been stung, and said in a voice choking with rage:

"You think I don't know what tricks you are up to, you damned sea lawyer, and what mutinous thoughts you have? Trying

to put the men up to no good, with all that talk about rights and things. Throwing your weight about. 'I know what's what, I'm not afraid of anything, but you fellows take it lying down.' As if I don't know what a smart fellow you think yourself, always trying to take a rise out of your superior officers, whom you swore to respect. But, never mind, I'll take the starch out of you. I'll make you toe the line. And if that won't help, we'll give you a disciplinary cure, Able Seaman or not. You'll get a real taste of the law when they flog you, if that's what you're asking for. You'll have the stuffing knocked out of you before that, though, when I report what a black sheep you are. That'll teach you to make mischief among the crew."

An angry gleam came into the sailor's eyes.

"All right, report me then!" he flared up. "Go and tell lies! I'll stand on my rights!"

"Shut up! How dare you!"

"I've been listening to your clever speeches, now listen to mine for a change!" Mityushin said with excited determination. "There are no witnesses here. I don't suppose you know what a rotter and a blackmailer people think you,

bo'sun. Go on, blow the gaff, Mister Bo'sun. Have the law on me. I'm not scared! Maybe the truth will come out about your taking money from the sailors and making them work for you. One makes a chair for you, another sews for you, or makes a pair of boots, or runs errands for you. It's against the law to hit us, but you dirty swab of a bo'sun and the petty officers knock our teeth out. You know only too well the men are afraid to complain, so that's why you bully them. All you know is to nose around, smelling for money—that's your God. God's only on your tongue, but in your soul you have filthy lucre and lawlessness. You call me sea lawyer and mischief-maker just because I say there are people without a conscience who set the law at naught? If I see you doing wrong, and say so, you call it mutiny. Here's one of my own kind, a fellow who was once an underdog just like I am, threatening me with punishment and a flogging. . . . You think it'll scare me, make me toe the line. Cleversticks, aren't you? You can see right through a man, but what you don't see is that not every man is a swine who will sell his soul for two kopeks. The chief officer, I daresay, has no idea what a lowdown rotter you are!"

That worthy boatswain, who considered himself a very prince among boatswains and one of the most important personages in the ship, was so stunned by the audacity of the attack that he made no attempt to stem the wrathful flood of speech.

Recovering from the shock, he bore down on the sailor with upraised fist. Mityushin, pale as death, stood his ground and looked the boatswain squarely in the face.

"You just dare," he said. "I'll bash that fat mug of yours to a pulp!"

Zhdanov looked away and let his fist drop. Almost choking with fury, he brought out in a slow rasping voice:

"You wait, I'll show you how to stand on your rights! You'll know what it is to insult the bo'sun. Get out!"

"Go and tell on me, Judas! Mind you don't choke over it yourself. Not everyone will believe you've discovered a mutiny," the sailor said contemptuously, then turned and left the cabin.

III

The sailors, too, called Mityushin "Daredevil." They marvelled at that "brainy," restless little sailor, who "feared nothing" and made such a bold stand against injustice and "worried himself sick" when things were done against the law.

The sailors listened with curiosity to his impassioned speeches, but had no special liking for this sea lawyer and felt shy of him on account of his acrimonious tongue and gift of ridicule. They were often at a loss to understand what that otherwise exemplary sailor "got so excited" about, and why he was continually making fun of his own mates.

"He's asking for trouble, that's what he is. Thinks too much of himself," ran the general opinion.

Daredevil felt that his wild yearning for justice met with no sympathy, that he was disliked on account of his sharp tongue and was fighting all on his own.

Nevertheless, he spared no effort to rouse a spirit of protest in the men and to poke fun at those who were left cold by his appeals.

To the gnawing restlessness in his heart was now added a deep sense of injury. One of the sailors had peached to that rat of a

bo'sun against his own mate! And why? Just because Mityushin wanted to see justice done for the sailors' own good! He knew that he had committed a breach of discipline in telling the boatswain off, and that he was "in for it." "It may even mean a court martial, if that low-down swine of a boatswain piles it up and tells the chief officer a pack of lies about me," he thought.

He had moments of weakness, when, doubting the triumph of truth, he pictured to himself a humiliating scene of merciless flogging "according to the law."

Daredevil, however, did not regret what had happened. On the contrary, he experienced a sense of moral satisfaction. His mind was set at ease, as it were, after he had got even with the boatswain.

"At least I let him know what a rotter he is!" Mityushin thought.

He believed that the boatswain was already reporting his case of gross insubordination to the chief officer, who would send for him after the break and demand an explanation. He waited anxiously and impatiently for the call, thinking: "Although the chief officer is strict, he'll hear me out, and understand

that it wasn't personal reasons that made a decent, hard-working sailor answer the bo'sun back. You can't call a fellow a mutineer just because he wants to see fair play and can't stomach the bo'sun's dirty tricks!"

Daredevil did not sleep. He ran over in his mind what he would say to the chief officer, who, after the boatswain's report, would be antagonized against him. A bold heart prompted bold words. They should be convincing, he thought, because they rang true.

His doubts were dissipated like clouds by a wind. His restless soul, the soul of a dreamer, believed that "truth would win out," and that the chief officer would "see daylight."

Coming to think of it, Mityushin so far had been well-treated aboard the *Grozyashchy*. As a matter of fact, he had won a certain amount of respect among the ship's company.

There were officers on the *Grozyashchy* who reminded one of the bad old days of so-called naval "training." This seemed to be coming into vogue again, and even the young midshipmen thought nothing of using their fists on the men.

They all seemed to realize, however, that Mityushin's sense of self-respect and appreciation of his rights set him apart from the rest of the ratings. In his case, therefore, the law protected him from ill-usage. Besides, he was an intelligent, industrious sailor with an excellent service record, and gave the officers no pretext for trying out their "training" methods on him.

The rest hour was over, and the crew was piped up.

After that general quarters for gunnery practice was sounded.

IV

The Admiral, a short fat man with a grey fringe of beard round his good-natured face, ascended the bridge. He wore a pleased benevolent smile, as he always did when his ship rode at anchor, working out his flag appointment for him for service afloat without him having to worry about the safety of the ironclad—everyone knows what delicate skill those leviathans require in handling and how liable they are to run on the rocks or go aground.

The Admiral's kind little eyes assumed a look of dreamy delight at the sight of the huge guns and the quick efficiency with which they were loaded. He seemed to be picturing to himself a real battle—if a man who had never been in one could do such a thing—with the *Grozyashchy*, of course, winning a victory over some huckster of an Englishman.

"Splendid, Victor Ivanovich! It gives me pleasure to watch our boys. They're a fine lot," the Admiral said to the captain, who was standing slightly behind him, and threw his head back and his chest out to look taller and more martial.

The captain, a thickset, dark, dignified man of middle age, who had been watching the gunnery practice with a somewhat anxious eye, touched his cap and leaned his body slightly forward.

"Do you know what I was thinking, Victor Ivanovich?" "I'm afraid not, Your Excellency."

"I was thinking that if England declared war on us they wouldn't stand a chance against us with men like these. The spirit's the thing. Don't you think so?"

"I suppose so, Your Excellency," the captain answered with the deferential air of

a well-disciplined subordinate, while inwardly he thought: "You don't know what you're talking about, Admiral. We daren't show our nose at sea. We'll hide our fleet away in Kronstadt and keep it there. As it is we're doing more standing than sailing." This quite suited the captain, however. Like the Admiral, he had no love of cruises, which were such a strain on the nerves for one who was cautious to the point of timidity and lacked confidence both in himself and in the ships which he commanded.

He had been in command of the *Grozyashchy* only two months, and as he did not know her qualities (formerly having handled battleships of a different type), he was naturally pleased that she was lying in Transund, and it was not without a certain fear that he thought of the responsibility of taking the seven-million-ruble battleship about the Gulf of Finland. One never knew what might happen! "What's the name of that gunner, Victor Ivanovich?" the Admiral asked, pointing a white stubby finger at Daredevil, who was in charge of one of the guns.

"Mityushin, Your Excellency."

"A splendid gunner. It does my heart good to look at him, Victor Ivanovich!"

"He's a conscientious sailor, Your Excellency. Isn't he, Ivan Petrovich?"

The question was addressed to the chief officer, a lanky, bespectacled man of over thirty with a naval college badge pinned to the lapel of his shabby jacket and the worried, peeved, and somewhat dazed look of a man who had forgotten something. His figure, his elongated face with a long nose and a receding forehead reminded one of a wading bird.

He corroborated the captain's testimony and added, addressing himself to the Admiral:

"A smart and intelligent sailor, Your Excellency!"

"And his conduct?"

"Very good indeed, Your Excellency."

"Doesn't get 'plastered'?" the Admiral asked with a good-humoured little chuckle.

"Sober."

"Then why don't you promote him to petty officer?" the Admiral suggested.

"He's on the promotion list. He'd make a good bo'sun, too. Your Excellency."

"I have a good eye for faces. I picked that sailor out at once," the Admiral said.

When gunnery practice was over the chief officer went up to Mityushin and said:

"Well done, Mityushin! The Admiral has taken notice of you."

"Yes, sir," the sailor answered noncommittally.

"Keep it up, Mityushin. You'll be promoted to petty officer."

Daredevil showed no enthusiasm and said nothing. And when the chief officer strode away on his long legs, turning his head from side to side, Mityushin said to himself with an ironic smile:

"A nice petty officer he's found, the Ostrich! Wait till the bo'sun goes and reports this evening and tells him a pack of lies. I suppose the Ostrich will send for me then."

But evening came, and the sailors had their supper, and no call came from the chief officer demanding Mityushin to his presence.

V

The uncertainty worried Mityushin. He wanted to take someone into his

confidence and unburden his mind to a sympathetic soul.

That evening he told Chizhov, the helmsman, about his clash with the boatswain. Chizhov was a careful, well-behaved, pleasant man. He never "showed his colours," as Mityushin expressed it, and for the most part kept silent or left the forecastle when Daredevil let his tongue run away with him. But he seemed to be in sympathy with Mityushin, and in private, on one occasion, expressed his approval of what he said about "the law," although he managed at the same time to be on good terms with the boatswain.

Mityushin's confidence elicited no sympathy this time. Chizhov shook his fair head ruefully, and looking round nervously with his sly slanting eyes, said in a low voice:

"You're in for it, Mityushin. Things look bad for you."

"D'you think so?" Mityushin queried doubtfully.

"You bet your life. You shouldn't have spoken to the bo'sun the way you did. You had no right to either. Didn't he treat you decent?"

"What if he did!"

"He didn't punch you in the jaw, did he? He didn't use bo'sun's language, did he?"

"He wouldn't dare."

"All he wanted was respect. What's the sense in kicking up a dust? You only got his dander up. Talking back at him and telling him what you thought of him is just asking for trouble. What good does it do you?" Chizhov said sententiously, disapproving of Mityushin's behaviour.

"What good?" Daredevil queried.

His mocking voice had in it the sad note of a disappointed man who had been let down by someone he had trusted.

"Throwing your weight about just to have, a laugh at the bo'sun's expense. Well, you've had your laugh—has it done you any good? All you've done is to get yourself into trouble over nothing. The bo'sun knows his onions, I bet. He'll make his case out regular style, and you'll be hauled up for mutinous behaviour. I'd like to see you prove it wasn't!"

"I'll prove it !" Daredevil cried vehemently.

"No, you won't. They'll court-martial you as sure as eggs is eggs."

"I don't care!" Mityushin said, angry and irritated.

"Whether you care or not, you'll have to face the music for riding the high horse. You've got the law on the brain. Think you have rights? They'll show you rights. And people will think you a fool into the bargain. Running your head against a stone wall. You're brainy and smart enough to ship a killick, be made petty officer. If you were on good terms with the big pots you'd live a decent quiet life. And now this is what you get for your crazy dreams—they'll put the kibosh on you. The chief officer is a strict man, he'll never forgive a chap in a case of insubordination. Such things are not forgiven, don't you make any mistake about it. And once they start the examination, they'll get to know all about that law stuff you are always spouting and your running down the officers. You ought to know better, a man in your position. Anyone would think you're daft the way you carry on. You'd have gone on living just like other people if you hadn't had that row with the bo'sun."

Daredevil sat in brooding silence, seemingly at a loss for words.

Thinking that he had him scared, Chizhov added:

"There's only one way out for you."

"What's that?"

"Apologize to the bo'sun. He doesn't care to have this thing buzzed about any more than you do. He'll let you down easily, I'm sure. It won't hurt you, will it?"

"That's what I call a good turn! Thanks, pal!" Daredevil answered gravely.

"What for? What are you driving at?"

"You've shown your true colours at last."

"You don't like it when a fellow talks sense, I see."

"Your kind of sense is not to my liking. D'you take me for a fool?"

"That's what you are, always kicking against the pricks, thinking a sight too much of yourself. Don't forget you're only a sailor."

"And if I sing small before the bo'sun, and get made petty officer, and start adorning that sly mug of yours with black eyes against every law, I'll be learning sense, eh?" the little sailor said with a sneer.

"So you think it funny?"

"I can't help it—you make me laugh."

"You'll be laughing on the wrong side of your mouth soon," Chizhov said angrily.

"Maybe you can tell me when?"

"Tomorrow for all I know. They'll knock the spots off you."

"For what reason?"

"You'll get your gruel for the bo'sun, for one thing. Didn't they flog a sailor here last summer and then pack him off for a disciplinary cure? Trust them!"

Mityushin was horrified at the thought that tomorrow he might be subjected to a shameful punishment, and that his own mate seemed to be gloating over his humiliation and this act of lawlessness.

In the darkness of the foredeck, where the two sailors stood talking at the ship's side, Chizhov could not see the pale agitated face and gleaming black eyes of Mityushin.

"I don't care! You can go and watch it!" Mityushin said defiantly, trying to conceal his horror.

"I can't make you out," Chizhov said in amazement. "Where did you get that daredevil of a character?"

"I caught it in a draught."

"Where?"

"In a factory."

"I see. And you haven't got over it even in the Tsar's service?" Chizhov said ironically, resenting Daredevil's tone.

"Looks like it."

"Funny thing."

"I don't suppose you've heard that people can hunger for justice?" Mityushin suddenly exclaimed.

Chizhov smiled sceptically.

"But how can you understand? You've got a pig's soul and a mean little mind. You're only too glad to see a sailor flogged against the law. Think it only hurts—the shame and wrong of it doesn't enter your mind. And the advice you gave me! You must have left your conscience in the village, if you ever had one. I knew you were a coward, but I thought you'd twig on the quiet," Mityushin added, raising his voice.

"What are you calling me names for? Who gave you the right?"

"Run off to your bo'sun, go on. Wag your pig's tail and tell on me. Shouldn't be surprised if you've done so already."

"They'll bring you to heel pretty quick, you crazy devil, you!" Chizhov said in a tone of hatred and walked away.

Hammocks were handed out. A prey to sad thoughts, Mityushin could not fall asleep for a long time.

At midnight he went on the watch and paced the deck, speaking to no one. He fell to brooding again, feeling miserable and lonely, when suddenly a young sailor, a first-year recruit, came up to him.

Mityushin stopped.

"What do you want?" he asked.

Dropping his voice to a whisper the young sailor began in a shy earnest voice:

"God will help you out of your trouble, Mityushin, for having the courage to speak out. I'm a simple fellow, but I understand what your heart is hankering for. It's hankering for justice. That's why you told the bo'sun what you thought of him. You're sorry for us sailors, you restless soul!"

"Thanks, Cherepkov, it's good to hear a kind word!" Mityushin said in a voice deep with emotion.

A load seemed to have been lifted off his mind, and he suddenly felt that he was no longer alone.

VI

The next morning, when the ship was undergoing her usual toilet, boatswain

Zhdanov went about looking as glum as a bear with a sore head.

He hazed the crew that day worse than ever, swore more than was his custom, found fault with everybody, and hit several of the sailors with cold-blooded brutality and slow silent deliberation.

Daredevil was upset.

To one of the sailors who nursed a bleeding mouth he said in a loud excited voice:

"Why do you allow that brute of a bo'sun to bully you? He has no right to hit you!"

The sailor was silent. So were the other sailors who happened to be standing about. They waited curiously to see what would happen. The boatswain stood near by and had heard every word.

However, he merely glanced at Mityushin with a look of intense malevolence and passed on with a remote, stern, and haughty air.

"I'll get it today," Mityushin decided.

Indeed, a quarter of an hour before the flag was hoisted, the chief officer's servant came trotting up to Mityushin.

"The chief officer wants to see you in his cabin," the man said in a funereal tone.

And lowering his voice to a hurried whisper, he added with sympathy:

"He's as mad as anything! That bo'sun's just been there and given Ostrich an earful about you. I went into the cabin and heard the bo'sun piling it up against you. I thought I'd warn you."

"Thanks, old chap," Mityushin said.

"Take my advice and hold your tongue. Don't contradict him. Let him have his say first, and when he's got off steam give him your own story. He'll let you be then."

Mityushin, rather pale and excited, trying hard to remember all the bold words he intended saying, hurried down into the wardroom.

Practically all the ship's officers were sitting there round the large table, drinking tea.

The animated talk ceased abruptly when Daredevil came in.

The wardroom had just learned that that intelligent and disciplined sailor had dared to "kick" and had even criticized the Admiral in front of the men. He had all but hit the boatswain, too.

Many of the officers looked with astonishment and cold hostility at the swarthy little sailor with the "insolent"

eyes, as he walked towards the chief officer's cabin with a firm resolute step.

"The cheeky bounder! What does he fancy himself, a damned agitator?" one good-looking young midshipman said contemptuously.

"I shouldn't call him names. It isn't fair play. For all we know the bo'sun may have a grudge against him and is just taking his revenge. He's not to be trusted," another midshipman, a tall dark officer with a good-natured open countenance, said in French in a tone of reproach.

Mityushin guessed that he was talking about him. He knew the tall dark midshipman for a "decent fellow" who treated the crew well and "understood the law."

Daredevil threw him, his sole defender, a swift glance of gratitude and boldly knocked on the door of the chief officer's cabin.

"Come in!"

The sailor entered a large airy cabin, shut the door behind him and stood there, pale and tense, staring hard at the chief officer. All the words he had intended saying slipped his memory for the moment.

Tall and gaunt, Ivan Petrovich sat at his desk with his long legs drawn up and his grey eyes gleaming angrily behind the lenses of his spectacles, while he took hurried puffs at his thick cigarette and pulled furiously at his fair scanty beard with long bony fingers.

The chief officer looked up at Mityushin, who had anything but a guilty air, and his eyes grew round with astonishment at the fellow's sheer insolence. He stared at Daredevil as though he had never seen him before and wanted to get a good look at the dangerous scoundrel who was guilty of such a flagrant breach of discipline and harboured such mutinous ideas.

The chief officer nursed his wrath in utter silence.

Several seconds passed.

The sailor met his glance steadily.

VII

"So that's what you are like!" Ivan Petrovich began at last, finishing his cigarette, "A Russian sailor has broken his oath. Yes. . . . Gone against his oath and his conscience! You incited the men to

insubordination against the powers that be. You insulted the boatswain, swore at him and threatened to assault him! You ridiculed your superior officers! And I wanted to promote you to petty officer, I thought you were—— I'll have you court-martialled. Sentenced to a naval prison."

Mityushin could hardly believe his ears when he heard what he was accused of and what punishment the chief officer threatened him with.

"Let me explain, sir!" he began.

"Silence!" shouted the chief officer.

Mityushin complied. His position seemed hopeless. The chief officer went on speaking, working himself up into a rage and threatening the offender with the direst penalties for his heinous crime.

"I'll have you arrested! Put on bread and water! And if you dare to be insolent again I'll have you flogged!" the chief officer wound up.

And the next instant his anger began to die down. It was like the bursting of a storm-cloud. He felt oddly put out by the look of deep distress on the pale, grave face of the "criminal," and the anguish in his eyes, which had in them an expression that was at once bold and full of reproach.

"Please, sir, let me explain!" Mityushin began again.

"What can you explain? The boatswain has told me all about you."

"The bo'sun's been telling lies about me, sir!"

"Nonsense! The boatswain would never slander a sailor."

"So help me God, sir, I'm telling the truth! The bo'sun's got a grudge against me—he told on me on purpose, and you believe him. The truth will come out in court, sir. . . ."

Daredevil's face breathed such earnestness and his voice had such a ring of truth in it that the chief officer no longer felt he was a "criminal" who deserved to be severely punished.

"Didn't you swear at the boatswain and threaten to beat him?" the officer said, somewhat disconcerted.

"I did, sir."

"The boatswain didn't ill-treat you, did he? Everyone treated you well. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, sir. The bo'sun didn't ill-treat me and everyone treated me according to the law. . . ."

"Then why did you insult the boatswain?"

"Because he bullies the sailors, sir, and there's no curbing him. You don't know how he blackmails the men and knocks them about. When he raised his fist against me in his cabin, I didn't stand for it. I told him I'd give tit for tat. Any man will say that when he's driven to it. There's no such law allowing anyone to knock men about and bully them. A sailor has feelings, too. I did answer back, sir—I admit. But I never mutinied or incited anyone to insubordination. I only told the sailors that it wasn't lawful to use one's fists, and that you had to live according to truth and justice. You can't call that mutiny, can you?"

Mityushin seemed to have burst the flood-gate of speech. Excitedly and passionately, he gave full details of his clash with the boatswain, explaining why he couldn't have respect for that rotter who made innocent men's lives hell for them, and they dared not complain for fear that the truth would be suppressed and those who were in the right would turn out to be in the wrong. He said what a misery shipboard service was because of it. Yet there was one law for all. . . . You only had

to abide by it and no one would have any grievance.

"Who are you to enforce the law? Who gave you the right?"

"I want to see fair play, sir. I said that a sailor shouldn't allow himself to be beaten."

"And criticized your superiors?"

"Yes, sir. I did take them down sometimes."

"How dare you judge your superior officers?"

"Every man has a right to judge things for himself, sir. What I criticized the officers for was that they used their fists on the men instead of showing them a lawful example. That's all my mutinous conduct amounts to, sir."

"Did you criticize me, too?"

"Yes, sir, sometimes," Daredevil frankly confessed.

"What for?"

"The same thing, sir."

"You *are* a daredevil, I see!" the chief officer murmured, but there was no longer any resentment in him.

He had the thoughtful disconcerted air of one who had been suddenly thrown off his balance.

A bright fleeting memory of youthful days when justice and fair play had meant a good deal to him too, flashed across his mind. Himself a man of honour, he was shocked by this revelation of the boatswain's tricks and meanness. Astounded though he was by Daredevil, he realized that the man was no mutineer, but just a busy-body, who deserved to be punished for breach of discipline. He was the kind of man who would give a lot of trouble though. If he were court-martialled he would certainly be sentenced to the convict labour gang and his life ruined. Besides, a good deal of what was going on aboard the *Grozyashchy* would come to light, and that would be very unpleasant for both the chief officer and the captain.

Ivan Petrovich considered himself a man of fair dealing. It occurred to him that if justice was to be done it would be the boatswain who would have to be court-martialled if all that Mityushin had told him was corroborated by an investigation. But the boatswain was an efficient officer whom he did not care to lose. And then again, a court martial would mean undesirable publicity, a thing the authorities would look askance at. And Ivan

Petrovich, who always had an eye to the main chance, was afraid of the authorities. Besides, by bringing the boatswain before a court martial the chief officer would be exposing his own guilt. How was it that he had made two cruises with the boatswain and never known of his misconduct?

Annoyed at all this "trouble" arising aboard the *Grozyashchy* because of a sailor, when he had his hands full enough with his official duties that kept him busy all day long, he was utterly at a loss what to do with Daredevil.

He thought it over, and after a minute or two came to a decision to hush up the affair. To the weak-willed man that he was this seemed the best way out.

And he said to Mityushin:

"I'll overlook your offence if you apologize to the boatswain. I don't want to get you into trouble. I'll have a word with the boatswain myself. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"But mind, this is the last time. Hold your tongue if you don't want to land in jail. Don't forget it. It's no business of yours to judge the boatswain. Leave that to his superior officers. If you think you are being

ill-used you can complain to those higher up."

The chief officer believed he had saved Daredevil, who ought to be grateful. At the same time he had quashed what had threatened to be an unpleasant affair. As for the boatswain, he would have a soft word to say in that bully's ear which would put a stop to his blackmailing and brutality.

But Mityushin, far from evincing gratitude, looked dark and gloomy.

"Go along, and thank your lucky stars!"

"Yes, sir. Only—— "

"What's it now?"

"I won't apologize to the bo'sun, sir. It's he who should be court-martialled, if anyone."

"Silence! I'll have you flogged!" the chief officer flared up.

"There's no such law, sir! Have me tried first. Justice wilt win out!" Daredevil said and walked out.

VIII

The chief officer changed his mind about having Daredevil flogged.

The day after investigations were completed Daredevil was sent to St. Petersburg, where he was put into the naval prison pending his trial. In the autumn he was transferred to the hospital, suffering from galloping consumption. In the hospital ward, too, Daredevil stood up for "the law" and made passionate speeches to the other patients in defence of Right and Justice.

He was still awaiting trial, expecting justice to "win out" and the boatswain to be removed.

But he did not live to see the day. He died on Christmas eve.